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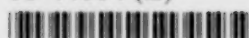
<i>President:</i>	Mr. Adom	(Côte d'Ivoire)
<i>Members:</i>	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Elé Ela
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gasri
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Duclos
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kuzmin
	Sweden	Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Mrs. Dickson
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Fatou Bensouda, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Bensouda.

Ms. Bensouda: Let me begin by congratulating Côte d'Ivoire on presiding over the Council during the month of December. I wish you continued success in that important role, Sir.

I thank you for the opportunity to present my twenty-eighth report on the situation in Darfur.

Over 13 years ago, on 31 March 2005, at a meeting also attended by the late Secretary-General Kofi Annan (see S/PV.5158), members of the Council came together to adopt resolution 1593 (2005). The Council considered that the situation in the Sudan constituted a threat to international peace and security and decided to refer the situation in Darfur since 1 July 2002 to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

Following the adoption of resolution 1593 (2005), members of the Council made statements that noted allegations of grave crimes and highlighted the need to ensure accountability and justice in Darfur. The representative of Benin, for example, stressed the need to end the reign of impunity and to ensure credible and timely action against persons charged with atrocities and serious crimes. Some members of the Council also emphasized that the Council's support would be crucial to ensuring an effective outcome to the referral of the Darfur situation to my Office. Since the Darfur situation was referred to my Office, we have consistently striven to establish the truth and to secure justice for victims

by pursuing accountability for the alleged perpetrators of crimes under the Rome Statute committed in Darfur.

At the request of my Office, the Pre-Trial Chambers of the Court issued multiple arrest warrants in the Darfur situation after independently assessing the evidence. Today, warrants remain outstanding for five persons, all of whom occupied positions of responsibility at the time of their alleged crimes, namely, officials of the Government of the Republic of the Sudan Mr. Omar Al-Bashir, Mr. Ahmad Harun and Mr. Abdel Hussein; militia leader Mr. Ali Kushayb; and rebel leader Mr. Abdallah Banda. Notably, several of those suspects continue to hold senior positions within the Government. Combined, those arrest warrants include over 60 counts of war crimes and over 50 counts of crimes against humanity. The alleged crimes include extermination, murder, rape, forcible transfer and torture. Those are crimes that rightly preoccupied and concerned the Security Council, resulting in the referral of the Darfur situation to my Office. Yet the alleged perpetrators of those crimes remain free, while the victims and affected communities continue to await justice.

My Office's investigations in the Darfur situation continued throughout the current reporting period and significant progress was achieved. Notwithstanding the many challenges we face, my investigators remain dedicated to their mission and continue to identify leads and to interview new witnesses each month. The body of evidence is increasing, and my prosecution team continues to prepare in anticipation of future arrest warrants and the surrender of any of the Darfur suspects.

My report notes the positive news that levels of violence against civilians in Darfur continued to decrease during the reporting period. Nevertheless, the impunity that resolution 1593 (2005) sought to end continues in Darfur; regrettably, so does the commission of serious crimes. Those ongoing crimes include attacks against personnel of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). In resolution 2429 (2018) of 13 July, the Council condemned the ongoing impunity for those who attack peacekeepers and urged the Government of the Sudan to do its utmost to bring all perpetrators of such crimes to justice. More than 11 years after Mr. Banda's alleged crimes against African Union peacekeepers, it is a serious indictment of us all that crimes against peacekeeping personnel continue to be committed in Darfur.

Conflict between forces of the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid also continues in the Jebel Marra area. My report refers to information from UNAMID about the destruction of villages and the killing, injury and displacement of civilians. I continue to be deeply concerned by reports of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in Darfur. In resolution 2429 (2018), the Council expressed concern that UNAMID is unable to access areas from which it has withdrawn. I call on the Government of the Sudan to respond affirmatively to the Council's request for UNAMID to have unfettered access throughout Darfur, not least because of the vital role that the UNAMID plays in monitoring and reporting violence against civilians in Darfur.

My analysts will continue to assess allegations of current crimes in Darfur, not for the purpose of simply monitoring and reporting on the findings of others, as some assert, but rather to ensure that my Office is aware of allegations of ongoing grave crimes committed in Darfur and to feed that information into our ongoing assessment of the situation of which we are seized, as well as our independent investigations. We will continue to make use of reports from reliable entities and sources operating in Darfur.

I wish to emphasize that, in direct contravention of resolution 1593 (2005), the Government of the Sudan continues its policy of antagonism and non-cooperation, effectively obstructing my Office's ability to conduct investigations on the ground in Darfur. The Council is once again invited to urge the Government of the Sudan to cooperate with my Office in accordance with its own resolution.

I now turn to the issue of cooperation more broadly. Regrettably, as I outline in my latest report, my Office continues to face multiple obstacles and impediments in relation to that issue. With regard to the arrest and surrender of the Darfur suspects, the Council will recall the litigation before the Appeals Chamber in relation to Jordan's failure to arrest and surrender Mr. Al-Bashir to the Court when he visited Jordan on 29 March 2017. Pre-Trial Chamber II found that Jordan had failed to comply with its obligations under the Statute and decided to refer Jordan to the Assembly of States Parties and the Security Council. As the Council is aware, Jordan appealed that decision, which resulted in extensive litigation during the reporting period. That involved multiple written briefs and culminated in a five-day hearing before the Court's Appeals Chamber,

from 10 to 14 September earlier this year. The issues focused on Head of State immunity, resolution 1593 (2005) and the articles of the Rome Statute relating to cooperation, consultations with the Court and the waiver of immunity. In the course of that process, multiple legal submissions were made, including by Jordan, the African Union, the League of Arab States, professors of international law and, of course, my Office. That comprehensive and inclusive legal process has now concluded. We await a final determination by the Appeals Chamber.

During the reporting period, Mr. Al-Bashir continued to travel internationally, including to Djibouti and Uganda in July. Both those States parties were previously referred to the Assembly of States Parties and to the Security Council for their failure to arrest and surrender Mr. Al-Bashir to the Court while on previous trips to their territory in 2016. No action was taken by the Council in relation to those or, indeed, any other referrals. It is therefore not surprising that States parties to the Rome Statute, such as Djibouti and Uganda, continue to host ICC suspects on their territory in blatant violation of the Court's findings. In the absence of any meaningful consequences for such instances of non-compliance, we are unlikely to see a change in such regrettable patterns. That status quo is hardly conducive to advancing the cause of justice in Darfur.

Yet again my Office calls on the Council to take meaningful action to give effect to non-compliance referrals by the Court. My Office took note of the declaration of 9 July by the High Representative of the European Union, which called on all United Nations Member States to abide by and to implement the resolutions adopted by the Council, notably resolution 1593 (2005). I remain grateful for the principled support of members of the Council, international and regional organizations and, indeed, all States that support the work of my Office in the Darfur situation.

In that regard, I was particularly encouraged by the recent Arria Formula meeting on the relationship between the Court and the Council convened on 6 July. That timely meeting was helpfully co-sponsored and organized by ICC States parties that are members of the Council, and I take this opportunity to once again express my appreciation to them for the initiative. The meeting provided a unique opportunity for the President of the Assembly of States parties, Council members, State representatives, civil society and my

Office, among others, to exchange views on how to further enhance coordination and synergies between the Council and the Court. Notably, numerous participants at that meeting expressed concern about the Council's failure to act in instances in which a State is referred to the Council pursuant to a finding of non-compliance by the Court. Several participants proposed concrete, entirely workable measures that the Council could adopt. I remain hopeful that the constructive dialogue and proposals at that meeting will provide further momentum that results in concrete action being taken by the Council on this issue.

As we are all aware, in resolution 1593 (2005) the Council decided that the Government of the Sudan and all other parties to the conflict in Darfur shall cooperate fully with, and provide any necessary assistance to, the Court and my Office. Yet the Government of the Sudan continues to completely disregard the Council's demand for such cooperation. On the occasion of my previous report to the Council I repeated my offer to the Government of the Sudan to engage in dialogue in relation to the situation in Darfur, including with respect to the issue of the surrender of the Darfur suspects to the Court. I also note that the Council, in resolution 2429 (2018), urged the Government of the Sudan to consolidate and expand its efforts to end impunity. Yet, despite my offer and the fact that the representatives of the Sudan previously asserted to the Council that combating impunity is a top priority, the Government of the Sudan has not engaged with my Office. I also note that, during the proceedings initiated by Jordan, the Appeals Chamber invited the Sudan and Mr. Al-Bashir to file submissions on the issues raised by the appeal. Yet they chose not to engage with the Court. The Rome Statute requires my Office to investigate incriminating and exonerating circumstances equally. If the Government of the Sudan has such evidence — both incriminating and exonerating — I invite it to come forward and share that evidence with my Office.

The Government of the Sudan can rest assured that the due process rights of any suspects who appear before the Court will be fully respected. Those include the right to counsel of their choice and, more important, the right to a fair, independent and impartial trial. Council members will recall that, at my previous briefing to the Council on the Darfur situation, the representative of Bolivia asked for a report on activities undertaken by the Court to promote the strengthening of judicial organs in the Sudan. Consistent with resolution 1593 (2005) and in

accordance with the principle of complementarity, my Office is prepared to support national efforts to combat impunity in Darfur to the extent that my mandate and limited financial resources will permit. However, in the absence of any cooperation from the Sudan, I regret that I am unable to report any progress in that regard. The Government of the Sudan can, and must, demonstrate its stated commitment to ending impunity and to its respect for the authority of the Council by opening a new chapter of cooperation with my Office. It should allow my staff to conduct investigations on the ground in Darfur and facilitate access to victims, witnesses and the relevant documentary evidence. I once again invite the Government of the Sudan to work with my Office to pursue justice for the victims of the unimaginable atrocities that have occurred in Darfur.

I will conclude by recalling another statement made by a Security Council member at the time that the Council adopted resolution 1593 (2015),

“what the Council said today is that there is no way, in our times, that anyone, anywhere in the world, can get away without just retribution for the commission of serious crimes.” (S/PV.5158, p. 10).

Regrettably, justice and accountability for Rome Statute crimes remain, for now, unrealized aims in the Darfur situation. This is undeniably an unacceptable situation, which must not be permitted to continue. Justice delayed is justice denied. The judgment of victims and the critical eyes of history are upon us.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Prosecutor Bensouda for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for her briefing.

The United States will always believe that victims in Darfur deserve justice and that accountability is essential for achieving a stable and lasting peace in Darfur. We will continue calling for all those responsible for the horrific crimes committed in Darfur to be held accountable for their actions. After 15 years of conflict and a genocide in Darfur, more than 300,000 people have been killed, and close to 2 million more have been internally displaced. Clashes between opposition and Government forces in Darfur's Jebel Marra area continue to exact a toll on the civilian population,

including the destruction of villages and the killing, injury and displacement of civilians.

The United States is encouraged by United Nations reporting that Darfur's overall security situation is improving. However, the security situation for civilians in Jebel Marra remains precarious due to ongoing fighting between opposition and Government forces. That fighting has reportedly included attacks on civilians. More broadly throughout Darfur, persistent risks to civilians result from intercommunal violence between farmers and herders and there is harassment of internally displaced persons (IDPs) by armed settlers, among other issues. We urge the Sudanese Government to cease restrictions on movement in Darfur, especially within the Jebel Marra region, for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and humanitarian organizations to support the region's fragile security gains.

The United States also remains deeply concerned about the vulnerability of Darfur's IDPs. The Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan highlighted land occupation and violence targeting internally displaced persons as a hindrance to IDP returns and the consolidation of peace in Darfur. The Independent Expert specifically noted sexual violence against displaced girls and women. Long-term stability in Darfur will depend on resolving the underlying causes of the protracted conflict. We welcome the 6 December signing of a pre-negotiations document by the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi and the Government of Sudan. With that document signed, both sides have now agreed to a framework for substantive negotiations to achieve a cessation of hostilities and address the root causes of the conflict. We call on both sides to engage in an inclusive and transparent way in the pursuit of an outcome that benefits all the people of Darfur, not just those with weapons. Lastly, we call on both the Government of the Sudan and Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid to immediately cease all hostilities and engage with the UNAMID Joint Chief Mediator on ways to begin peace talks.

The United States supports the establishment of benchmarks and indicators of achievement to strengthen the rule of law in the Sudan, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his 12 October report on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2018/912). The proposed benchmarks include, inter alia, the establishment of a truth,

justice, and reconciliation commission, a Sudan police force presence in all localities and investigations and prosecutions by Sudan's judicial system of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence. We acknowledge the Government of the Sudan's steps to strengthen judicial institutions through the deployment of judges and prosecutors. We encourage the Government of the Sudan to continue reinforcing that process to ensure that victims of human rights violations and abuses have adequate access to the judicial system.

As the international community's support of the Sudan in Darfur transitions from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, the United States will remain engaged on Darfur. We have demonstrated that through the phase-2 framework for United States-Sudan bilateral relations, which launched in October 2018, and through continued support to help meet the needs of more than 3 million people who require humanitarian assistance in Darfur. The phase-2 framework seeks to expand our bilateral cooperation and facilitate gradual but meaningful reforms to enhance stability and strengthen human rights protections and practices in the Sudan. That cooperation also aims to support freedom of religion, freedom of expression, particularly for the press, humanitarian access, the cessation of internal hostilities and a more conducive environment for progress in the Sudan's peace process.

The United States will use all appropriate tools at its disposal to press the Sudan to improve human rights practices and protect fundamental freedoms for the people of Darfur. We believe that the United Nations should also make promoting and protecting the human rights of Darfuris the heart of its efforts in Darfur, whether through UNAMID or the evolving United Nations country team presence. The international community must ensure that human rights monitoring and reporting continue in Darfur following the drawdown of UNAMID, ideally through the establishment of a full-fledged office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as called for in the special report of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (S/2018/530). We are eager to hear an update from the High Commissioner's Office on steps taken towards the establishment of a country office.

The people of Darfur are hungry for peace after 15 years of conflict. A Sudan that adheres to the rule of law, respects human rights, allows unhindered

humanitarian access to all populations in need and breaks the cycle of impunity is one that will enjoy a sustained peace and prosper. We remain committed to working with the Government of the Sudan to usher in that future.

In closing, I must reiterate the long-standing concerns of the United States regarding the International Criminal Court (ICC). The United States has consistently rejected any assertion of ICC jurisdiction over nationals of States that are not parties to the Rome Statute, absent of a Security Council referral or the consent of such States. The United States regards any ICC investigations and other activities concerning United States or Israeli personnel as illegitimate and unjustified.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is grateful for the informative briefing delivered by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Ms. Fatou Bensouda, on her twenty-eighth report pursuant to resolution 1593 (2005). We also pay tribute to the hard work carried out by her Office on this case. We have taken stock of the progress made by the Darfur investigation team during the reporting period, as well as the difficulties that the Prosecutor's Office faces both in the course of its investigations and in its judicial activities, hindering the fulfilment of the task entrusted to it by the Security Council.

The situation in Darfur triggered the first referral of a case by the Security Council to the International Criminal Court more than 13 years ago. Since then, some 28 reports have been submitted and yet the case continues to languish in the investigation phase, with serious obstacles to making progress. We reiterate that the Council cannot remain indifferent to the fact that the investigation has been prolonged for more than a decade. It is clear that the time elapsed has not contributed to shedding light on the crimes committed and has made it more difficult to attribute accountability, not to mention the high economic cost, as highlighted by the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute with regard to the cases that the Council has referred to the Court. Fortunately, the Assembly of States Parties has also provided very concrete indicators regarding the budget in order to ensure the most efficient, effective and transparent use of the funds. The Office of the Prosecutor, which utilizes the largest percentage of those resources, now faces the challenge of prioritizing their optimal use.

Bolivia believes that those who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity or genocide must be held accountable before the Court. We cannot deny that that is an important and fundamental element to consolidating peace in Darfur. However, over the past few years we have witnessed signs of positive progress in the Sudan. As indicated in the latest reports of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), as well as the recent presidential statement of the Security Council (S/PRST/2018/19) and even in the most recent report of the Prosecutor, the general improvement of the situation in Darfur and the progress achieved in terms of cooperation between the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations have facilitated the work of UNAMID on the ground. We believe that that achievement is principally the result of the joint work carried out among the African Union, the United Nations and the Government of the Sudan. All of those efforts must remain focused on the consolidation of peace in Darfur.

We are also encouraged to note that the ICC and the African Union are improving cooperation between their two institutions. The Court should contribute to the efforts of the international community, in particular those of regional organizations, to strengthen the political processes in the Sudan, especially those related to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. We reiterate that cooperation and coordination between the ICC and the African Union are critical, as highlighted in resolution 1593 (2005).

We emphasize that the development and future of international criminal justice are closely tied to the concepts of cooperation and complementarity among States. The International Criminal Court is intended to complement the primary sovereign capacities of each State to administer justice within its territory. Therefore, in addition to ensuring effective and timely trials, we must also restore local capacities. That highlights the fact that it is now necessary to grant special attention to reviewing the case of Darfur, which the Prosecutor mentions in her report, introduced today. It also calls on the Office of the Prosecutor to assess the array of cultural, social and political scenarios in which it intervenes, the evaluation of which is unavoidable if progress is to be made in terms of effective cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of suspects. Bolivia insists on the importance of an understanding that transcends traditional approaches that are ineffective, onerous and obstructive. A restorative justice that

promotes peace and reconciliation among peoples remains possible.

In that regard, in celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Rome Statute this year, we should take the opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of the Court and on whether the model as originally conceived still meets the expectations of cooperation and universality. The Security Council and the membership of the United Nations in general should value the work that the Court undertakes in order to pursue the investigations and cases referred to it — even more so when we consider that several States, including members of the Council, are not yet parties to the Rome Statute.

For the same reason, the debate on the impunity of many of those responsible for the commission of crimes against humanity, war crimes or genocide has been weakened relative to the capacities of the Court, serving only to diminish its effectiveness in fulfilling its duties. We insist on the fact that we cannot maintain sincere dialogue while there are still countries demanding the full rigour of justice without complying with their own international obligations, including by openly denouncing the Court.

Finally, in respecting its own obligations as a State party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Bolivia supports efforts to seek justice and fight impunity. We therefore urge all States that have not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute in order to guarantee its universal jurisdiction. We believe that the value of the principle of universality of international criminal justice is critical in that regard.

Ms. Schoulgin Nyoni (Sweden): I wish to thank Ms. Fatou Bensouda, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), for her updates to the Council today.

We welcome the important developments that have been made in the ongoing investigations, including the collection of evidence by the Darfur investigation team, since we last met on this item in June (see S/PV.8290). It is evident that the Office of the Prosecutor and relevant partners continue to make progress on this file.

Member States, on the other hand, continue to fail in upholding their responsibilities. All suspects remain at large and the President of the Sudan continues to travel internationally, including to States parties to the Rome Statute that have an obligation to arrest and surrender

suspects to the Court. The failure to implement the Court's orders is not only disappointing — it is disturbing. Yet again, we call on the Government of the Sudan and all Member States to cooperate fully with the ICC, in accordance with resolution 1593 (2005), and to arrest individuals subject to arrest warrants. The Government of the Sudan must also take further steps to ensure justice for the women, men, girls and boys who have been victims of horrendous crimes during the conflict in Darfur.

The issue of non-cooperation with the Court remains challenging. Without its own enforcement mechanism, the Court relies on States to fulfil its mandate, including by executing arrest warrants. The Council should approach cases of non-cooperation in a structured manner. We support the proposal made by France at our last briefing with regard to inviting Member States that have been found to be in non-compliance with the Court's orders to address the Council. The Court's decisions must be respected.

Turning to the current situation in Darfur, we welcome that the reported violence against civilians has declined and that the overall situation has continued to improve, as noted in the Prosecutor's report. However, we remain concerned about the reported sexual and gender-related violence, which remains a serious problem. A holistic approach to sustaining peace and addressing the root causes of instability, including by building effective rule of law institutions, is essential to addressing the remaining challenges.

A sustained focus on peacebuilding and development activities remains critical, and in this regard we welcome the presidential statement adopted earlier this week on this very issue (S/PRST/2018/19).

During Sweden's two years on the Council, we have followed the work of the ICC and the Prosecutor's Office closely. We have seen how the Court, through dedicated and efficient action, has taken significant steps to ensure accountability for perpetrators of the worst crimes known to humanity. The Court has continually contributed to the advancement of international criminal law, including by rendering landmark verdicts on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, which is a matter to which Sweden has paid particular attention during our time on the Council.

We have also seen the tireless efforts made by the Prosecutor to engage the international community,

not least the African Union and African States, and inform all Member States about the work of the Court. We commend the Prosecutor's outreach efforts. We are also encouraged by her work on integrating a gender perspective and analysis into the Office's work, including policies on sexual and gender-based crimes, as well as children.

This year has been a special year, as we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute. Only a few days ago, we also celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which are both based on the idea of the inherent and inviolable rights of every individual and the need for individual criminal responsibility for mass atrocities. The international community's recognition of the fact that upholding human rights and pursuing justice are fundamental to a just and sustainable peace represents an acknowledgement, reflected by the actions of the United Nations and international criminal justice, that now forms part of the fabric of this Organization.

This year's anniversaries remind us of how much we, through joint efforts, have achieved for the development of the international justice system. We should be proud, but, regrettably, our achievements have been clouded by increased pressure on and hostile rhetoric against the Court. We therefore repeat what we said during the briefing on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals earlier this week (see S/PV.8416): that as regrettable as this situation is, what it also tells us is that the work of the international Court and Tribunals has real impact. The courts and the Tribunals were not established to serve or depend on any one country's interests. They were set up to see that justice is served for victims and to ensure accountability for perpetrators of the worst crimes known to humanity, and, naturally, they are uncomfortable for those who violate international law.

The ICC is not targeted at any particular region or continent; it is impartial and goes wherever justice is most in danger. It is a Court of last resort that complements and does not replace national courts. Complementarity and cooperation between national jurisdictions and the Court are essential features of the Rome Statute.

We wish to conclude by reiterating our steadfast support for the Court and the Office of the Prosecutor.

Ms. Bensouda's unwavering commitment to justice is admirable, and we commend her for her continual fight for accountability, not least in these challenging times.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I thank Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda for her report and for the work that the Office of the Prosecutor continues to carry out in this case, in keeping with its commitment to international criminal justice. All of this highlights the need for all States and the regional and other international organizations concerned to cooperate fully, as urged by the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, in resolution 1593 (2005). This also reminds us of the significance of the Council's and other stakeholders' actions and support for the work of the Office of the Prosecutor, with a view to ensuring that the victims and the witnesses eventually see justice done.

An additional reason for the importance of this follow-up is the fact that, as Ms. Bensouda observed in her previous briefing to the Council,

"Sustainable peace and stability can return to Darfur only once the root causes of conflict are addressed. That includes ending impunity for alleged crimes under the Rome Statute in Darfur and ensuring accountability for the victims of those serious crimes." (see S/PV.8290, p. 4)

We call on all stakeholders to work towards that end and to cooperate with the Office, including, but not limited to, on facilitating the collection of evidence, the freezing of assets and assistance in the arrest and surrender of fugitives.

We welcome the Office's dedication in pursuing investigations against suspects in the Darfur situation, the significant progress achieved and the cooperation and assistance from some States in furtherance of its mandate. We encourage it to continue fulfilling its commitment despite the challenges.

While we acknowledge that the reported violence against civilians there appears to have decreased, we are concerned about the clashes between Government forces and the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction in Jebel Marra and their consequences for the civilian population. We share the Office's concern about the high numbers of internally displaced persons and their fate upon their return to their areas of origin, including the risk of becoming victims of violence, including sexual violence, especially for women and

girls. Let me stress once again that if we do not address the root causes of conflict and devise a sustainable solution allowing millions of internally displaced persons to safely return to their homes, durable peace in Darfur may be hard to achieve.

We take note of the Office's reports on the travel of some of the suspects to several States, as well as the failure by Rome Statute States parties to arrest and surrender fugitives from the Court, both of which regrettable. We call on all stakeholders to undertake adequate steps to address these issues.

In that regard, we take note of the fact that the Prosecutor has urged the Council to consider options to respond to States parties that invite and host Darfur suspects on their territory. We also reiterate the proposal to invite States deemed by the Court to have breached their obligation to cooperate to address the Council.

Additionally, we support the position that on the basis of such an exchange, the Council determines the concrete steps and effective measures to be taken when it is seized of the issue of States' non-cooperation with the Court. We would like to reiterate in this context our position expressed during the 6 July Arria Formula meeting on relations between the Court and the Council, which Poland co-sponsored.

To conclude, we would like to reiterate our appeal to demonstrate support and cooperate with the Office and the Court in relation to the Darfur situation. Darfur's victims and witnesses, to whom we pay tribute, deserve no less.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China listened closely to the briefing by Prosecutor Bensouda. In recent years, the political and security situation in Darfur has improved. The Sudanese Government signed an agreement on relaunching the Doha negotiations with the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi, the Justice and Equality Movement and other armed groups. This is conducive to further improving the situation in Darfur. China appreciates the efforts made by the Sudanese Government to maintain peace and stability in Darfur and to promote the political process.

Developments in Darfur have shown that the Sudanese Government is fully capable of gradually taking over the responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and stability in Darfur. It is our hope that the international community will continue to respect the ownership of the Sudanese Government

on the question of Darfur and provide constructive assistance for peace and security in Darfur so as to achieve lasting peace, stability and sustainable development there.

China's position on the International Criminal Court (ICC) remains unchanged. China hopes that the Security Council and the ICC will fully respect the judicial sovereignty of the Sudan, fully heed the legitimate demands of the African Union and the Sudanese Government made to the ICC concerning the Sudan, and fully respect the views of the African Union and the League of Arab States. China has always believed that Heads of State enjoy privileges and immunity under international law. The referral by the Security Council of the situation to the ICC does not automatically remove the immunity of Heads of State.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands joins others in welcoming the Prosecutor back to the Security Council. We thank Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda for her briefing and her report.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands wishes to avail itself of this opportunity to reiterate its full support for the International Criminal Court. That institution was created to strengthen the international rule of law by bringing those responsible for gross human rights violations and international crimes to justice. The International Criminal Court is the only permanent international court that can judge the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community. We express our gratitude for the continued commitment of the Prosecutor and her Office while working in the most difficult conditions.

Please allow me to focus on three important aspects: first, the situation in Darfur; secondly, accountability; and thirdly, cooperation with the Court.

First, the Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the decrease in fighting in Darfur and in the level of violence against civilians in recent months. However, we remain deeply concerned about continued human rights violations committed by several parties to the conflict, including the Government of the Sudan. We are also extremely concerned about continued reports regarding sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings.

At the same time, the situation with respect to the 2.1 million internally displaced persons seems

unchanged. We underline that any return should be safe, voluntary and in accordance with international law. We remind the Council that charges in the Sudan case include genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The severity of these charges led the Council to refer the situation in the Sudan to the ICC 13 years ago.

This leads me to my second point, concerning accountability. Accountability for international crimes and gross human rights violations is not only vital to justice, but the only way that leads to sustainable peace. Ultimately, it is about bringing justice to the victims by ensuring the accountability of the perpetrators. The people of Darfur, including those present here today, deserve this.

Gross human rights violations can also trigger further conflict and need to be addressed to ensure any form of sustainable peace. If we do not take this seriously and act upon this belief, opportunism will continue to prevail and the international rule of law will continue to be undermined. We need to end the climate of impunity. It is the Council's responsibility to stop such developments and ensure the effectiveness of the decisions it has made in the past. That is the only way to ensure international peace and security.

My third point concerns cooperation with the Court. In 2005, the Council unanimously referred the situation in the Sudan to the International Criminal Court. Today, over 13 years after the adoption of resolution 1593 (2005), all suspects in this case remain at large, while the charges remain in effect. Paragraph 2 of the resolution requires the Government of the Sudan and all other parties to the conflict to cooperate fully. It also calls upon all States and regional and international organizations to cooperate fully with the Court and the Prosecutor.

The Court is heavily dependent on cooperation to function effectively. It is unacceptable that fugitives of the Court continue to travel unhindered. We align ourselves with the Prosecutor in urging those States that invite and host suspects on their territory to consult with the Court. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to call upon all States to meet their obligations under resolution 1593 (2005), to cooperate fully with the Court and to fulfil their international obligations. We also urge the Council to continue to work on ways to address cases of non-cooperation with the Court.

In conclusion, we remind our fellow Council members that we bear a shared responsibility in the area of cooperation to ensure that the International Criminal Court can execute the mandate that the Council decided to give it 13 years ago. Let me reiterate our great thanks to the Prosecutor and her Office for their tremendous efforts under difficult circumstances.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Ms. Fatou Bensouda, for her semi-annual briefing to the Council and her efforts to uphold the international rule of law, justice, transparency and accountability. We take note of the twenty-eighth report of the Office of the Prosecutor and would like to make the following observations.

Kazakhstan welcomes Khartoum's commitment to stability in Darfur and its strengthened cooperation with the United Nations and the African Union (AU). These efforts have resulted in the continued improvement of the security situation in Darfur, as well as an overall reduction in intercommunal clashes, criminal activities and human rights incidents. We note that Khartoum has been able to consolidate its authority across the Darfur area and has demonstrated its political will to sustainably address the challenges in the region. These positive results would not have been achieved without respecting the national ownership, sovereignty and independence of the Sudan.

Kazakhstan is confident that constructive and inclusive dialogue, in accordance with the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, is the only way to establish peace, stability and justice in Darfur. We therefore welcome the signing of a pre-Doha negotiation agreement between the Government of the Sudan, the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi and the Justice and Equality Movement on 6 December. We encourage the Government of the Sudan to maintain this positive movement and continue to work diligently with all relevant parties towards advancing the peace process, addressing the root causes of the conflict and achieving peace and prosperity for the entire Sudanese population.

We also need to acknowledge the Sudan's constructive efforts to address regional peace and security issues, including terrorism and human trafficking. It is commendable that the Sudan has been playing an important role in advancing the peace process in South Sudan. Kazakhstan underscores the critical role of regional cooperation in resolving the crisis in

Darfur and its return to peace, justice and stability. We therefore suggest that the Court take into consideration the unified position of the African Union and establish dialogue with the AU Open-ended Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the ICC. We encourage the Court to join regional and international efforts by enhancing the Sudan's capacity to promote the rule of law and protect human rights.

In conclusion, we believe that only joint efforts and mutual trust between all parties and institutions will lead to a stable, peaceful and prosperous Sudan.

Mrs. Gasri (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Prosecutor, Ms. Fatou Bensouda, for her twenty-eighth report and for her briefing, as well as for the progress made regarding the situation in Darfur.

On behalf of France, I would like to thank the Prosecutor and her teams for the indispensable work they are carrying out on behalf of the victims awaiting recognition and reparations; for the witnesses who truly believe in international justice; and for the Security Council, which referred the situation of Darfur to the International Criminal Court by resolution 1593 (2005) 13 years ago. We are starkly aware of the difficulty of this task.

The responsibility of the Council is the same as it was 13 years ago. It must take resolute action to fight against impunity in the Sudan and to put an end to the grave crimes committed in Darfur. This is critical to the achievement of any long-term stabilization in Darfur and in the Sudan. The International Criminal Court is essential in that regard.

As others have already said, the overall improvement in the security situation creates opportunities for stabilization, which is encouraging. However, there are still many challenges to address, particularly regarding the protection of civilians. That is particularly the case in Jebel Marra, where clashes continue with consequences in the form of attacks on civilians, displaced populations and human rights violations. We are worried about sexual and gender-based violence, which victimizes women and girls in particular and does so with complete impunity. We are also concerned about the plight of the displaced populations. Lasting solutions must be found for the 2 million displaced people in Darfur.

It is imperative that the Sudanese authorities and armed groups make progress in the peace process.

Beyond the cessation of hostilities, it is important to address the root causes of the conflict, including the issues of landownership, access to natural resources and, of course, the restoration of the rule of law. The ability to effectively combat impunity and strengthen legal institutions and respect for human rights are inextricably linked to this.

In all these areas, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) must play its full role. It is particularly essential to ensure that it has access to the areas where civilians are most vulnerable. Humanitarian access, which must be guaranteed, is essential in Jebel Marra and elsewhere. It will also be important to strengthen the country team by ensuring that it is adequately equipped, funded and deployed with a view to UNAMID's eventual withdrawal. As of now, both UNAMID and the United Nations country team must be able to monitor the situation of human rights, internally displaced persons and sexual violence closely, including in remote areas.

France would like to once again remind the Council of States' obligation to cooperate with the Court, in accordance with the Council's resolutions. That obligation is primarily incumbent on the Sudan, which must cooperate with the Court in executing arrest warrants against its nationals for acts committed on its territory, as required by resolution 1593 (2005). We must respond to the Court's legitimate requests so that it is able to fully carry out its mandate. France will not let refusals to cooperate be taken lightly, especially when they come from States parties to the Rome Statute. In that respect, we were pleased that in her most recent report the Prosecutor referred to the discussions in our Arria Formula meeting of 6 July, as well as to France's proposal that States that the Court has found to be in breach of their obligation to cooperate with the Court be asked to explain themselves to the Council. We reiterate our proposal.

Mr. Kuzmin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We have studied the twenty-eighth report of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the investigation of the situation in Darfur. We discovered two lines in paragraph 22 with a puzzling sentence about some apparently significant progress in the investigation. That was all there was about the investigation. For the remainder of the report, the Office of the Prosecutor busied itself tracking the international visits of President Omar Al-Bashir of the Sudan.

As I understand it, we are seeing the emergence of a new and fascinating topic, which is holding States accountable for violating their obligations to cooperate with the ICC. That is undoubtedly less time-consuming and costly than the scrupulous gathering of evidence of the crimes committed by all the parties to a conflict — I repeat, by all the parties to a conflict — interviewing victims and witnesses and so forth. Am I right?

Meanwhile, the President of the Sudan, like any other president, enjoys immunity from foreign criminal jurisdiction. That immunity continues to be in effect after a situation is referred to the ICC. In not cooperating with the ICC, States, including parties to the Rome Statute, are acting in accordance with their international legal obligations, and our position on the issue has not changed. We urge the ICC to focus on its main functions and to finally begin an objective, comprehensive investigation of the situation in Darfur.

Mr. Elé Ele (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): In taking the floor on this particular agenda item, we would like to once again welcome Ms. Fatou Bensouda and thank her for her report, which is virtually the same as the preceding one on the most recent judicial activities and ongoing investigations of the Office of the Prosecutor and on the specifics of the issue of cooperation on the Darfur issue. According to the document circulated, which we have studied carefully, there have been no significant changes since the previous report of the Office of the Prosecutor, and while it states that the research team has made significant progress, it does not clarify what that progress is. I am sure everyone here would be interested in a clarification about what is new in the report and the most significant developments that have occurred in the reporting period.

We are pleased about the gradual improvements in the security situation, but we deplore the armed clashes that occurred in southern Jebel Marra in September and that resulted in further displacements and the killing of 10 civilians in Gubbo. We also condemn the attacks on civilians, sexual violence against women and internally displaced persons. In that regard, we appeal to the international community and the parties to the conflict to work to improve the living standards and restore dignity to the people of Darfur.

With regard to the fugitives sought by the International Criminal Court, the report cites Equatorial Guinea as one of the countries visited by President

Omar Hassan Al-Bashir of the Sudan. Certainly, as Head of State, he was invited to Malabo along with his counterparts to celebrate and commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea on 12 October. In that regard, I would like to make it clear that Equatorial Guinea is not a party to the Rome Statute or to the International Criminal Court. We therefore do not accept or endorse the selective prosecution policies applied by the Court, which do not even take into consideration the respect and immunity due to Heads of State in the full exercise of their functions, as in the case of President Al-Bashir. We believe that such actions and approaches hinder cooperation with the Court whether by States that are party to the Rome Statute or those that are not, and that they cast doubt on the Court's credibility.

Mrs. Dickson (United Kingdom): I would first like to thank the Prosecutor for her twenty-eighth report on the situation in Darfur and for her briefing today. I would also like to commend the hard work that she and her staff have done in relation to this investigation and their commitment to making progress and getting justice for the victims.

The United Kingdom welcomes the reports that the level of violence against civilians in Darfur has fallen over the past six months. As the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) draws down, we encourage the Government of the Sudan to focus its efforts and resources on building the capacity of the Sudanese police force and judiciary to prevent, respond to and investigate human rights abuses and violations. We continue to support the Government of the Sudan's stated aim of opening an office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights before next October. More broadly, we encourage the Government of the Sudan to engage constructively with the Secretary-General's recommended benchmarks in order to ensure that the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in Darfur is a success.

While the situation in wider Darfur shows signs of improvement, the situation in Jebel Marra remains of serious concern. The ongoing targeting and displacement of civilian populations is particularly worrying, with as many as 2 million internally displaced persons currently in Darfur. The United Kingdom urges the Government of the Sudan to abide by its unilateral cessation of hostilities and to facilitate unfettered access throughout Darfur to UNAMID and humanitarian actors. We also urge the Sudan Liberation

Army-Abdul Wahid to extend its unilateral cessation of hostilities, which is due to expire on 18 December, and to engage immediately with the peace process.

The United Kingdom welcomes the recent signing in Berlin of a pre-negotiation agreement for the resumption of the peace process in Darfur and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel meeting in Addis Abba. The people of Darfur have already waited too long for sustainable peace, justice and accountability. We therefore urge all parties to build on the current momentum by swiftly agreeing to a permanent ceasefire and engaging meaningfully in negotiations to reach an inclusive political settlement that addresses the root causes of the conflict.

The United Kingdom was pleased to co-host the Arria Formula meeting in July that resulted in productive discussions on the relationship between the Court and the Council. We encourage further discussion on ideas generated from that meeting to improve the relationship, including addressing non-compliance by States parties. We call on all States parties to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) and abide by their Rome Statute obligations. We note the Government of the Sudan's continuing complete disregard for its obligations under resolution 1593 (2005) to cooperate with the Court and to fulfil its international obligations. We yet again urge the Government of the Sudan to cooperate fully with the Court and the Office of the Prosecutor and to provide them with assistance.

The United Kingdom continues to be frustrated about the fact that fugitives of the Court, including President Al-Bashir, are still travelling overseas unhindered, including to the territory of States parties to the Rome Statute. We will continue to raise our concerns with the relevant Governments and to renew our call on all States to cooperate with the ICC in relation to the Darfur situation, as required by the Security Council, and on States parties to abide by their obligations under the Rome Statute. We urge any State that feels unable to cooperate with the Court for any reason to consult the Court's authorities. We also support France's proposal that States that according to the Court have not complied with their obligations to cooperate with it be invited to address the Security Council.

Finally, we acknowledge the Prosecutor's dedication to her continuing investigations, and welcome the news that significant progress has been achieved by the Darfur investigation team within the reporting period.

We recognize the importance for the victims and their families, some of whom I understand are with us today, of hearing regularly from the Prosecutor on progress in the investigation, and it is important for the Council to hear from her too. The United Kingdom again thanks the Prosecutor for her report, and her Office for its persistent pursuit of justice for victims in Darfur. We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the United Kingdom's commitment to supporting the Court, both as a State party to the Rome Statute and as a member of the Council.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome Ms. Fatou Bensouda, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). We have taken note of the content of her briefing on the twenty-eighth report of the ICC concerning the Sudan.

The Security Council must deal with the issue of Darfur in a consistent and comprehensive manner, particularly in the light of the progress that has been made there. Darfur province has just emerged from a phase of conflict and is entering a peacebuilding phase. In a presidential statement three days ago (S/PRST/2018/19), among other things the Council welcomed the improvement of the security situation in Darfur and the settlement of conflicts between tribes, thanks to the efforts of the Government of the Sudan and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. The Council encouraged States to contribute to the transition process for peacebuilding in Darfur. We hope that the ICC's proceedings will not hinder peace efforts in the Sudan.

The ICC proceedings attempt to set a legal precedent for a President who is still in office and enjoys immunity under international law, and the Court's decision concerning the President of the Sudan does not have the agreement of the international organizations of which the Sudan is a member, including the League of Arab States, the African Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, all of which belong to international and regional partnerships of the United Nations under Chapter VIII of the Charter. We want to once again recall resolution 514 of the twenty-second Arab Summit, adopted in Sirte in 2010, which represents the Arab position on the ICC proceedings against the President of the Sudan and which rejects the politicization of the principles of international justice and infringements on the sovereignty, unity and stability of States.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to respecting the principles of international law, including the sovereignty of States. We reiterate the importance of respecting the sovereignty and independence of the Sudan.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): This is the last time that Ethiopia will speak on this subject in the Council, and our position on this issue remains the same. The referral by the Security Council of the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the subsequent developments concerning the President of the Sudan do more harm than good. To make matters worse, the way the ICC has liberally interpreted and applied the Council's referral is very short-sighted, with grave implications for the peace and security of the Sudan and the region.

That also continues to be the position of the African Union (AU), which should not be surprising. It is well known that the manner in which the ICC has operated has left a very bad impression in Africa, and that is why Africa has been expressing serious reservations about the ICC that have been reflected in a number of decisions adopted by the African Union's policy organs. The African Union Commission is taking the necessary legal and other initiatives to address those issues based on the decision of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government. However, the intent of those exercises should not be misunderstood. As a matter of fact, many of the member States of the African Union were among the first to ratify the Rome Statute. Time and again we in Africa have affirmed our unflinching commitment to fighting impunity and promoting democracy, the rule of law and good governance throughout the continent, in accordance with the Constitutive Act of the African Union, and that has been empirically validated by bold actions taken by the AU in recent times.

The AU reiterates that the quest for justice should be pursued in a manner that is not detrimental to the quest for peace. The Security Council's referral of the situation in Darfur runs counter to that, which is why the AU has repeatedly asked that the proceedings against President Omar Al-Bashir be suspended and urged the Security Council to withdraw its referral to the ICC. It is indeed regrettable that Africa's repeated request has so far been neither heard nor acted on. What the African leaders have requested is far from difficult for the Security Council to meet. The Council has simply been asked to discharge its responsibility

under the Charter, and as far as we are concerned, there is no legitimate reason to reject the request. The issue of the ICC has remained a nuisance in the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union, and the sooner we address it through genuine dialogue based on trust and understanding, the better it will be for our ability to address challenges to peace and security in Africa. That is the kind of opportunity that Africa has been looking for but has been denied by the Council.

Turning to the situation in Darfur, we are pleased to note once again that it continues to improve and can no longer be characterized as an armed conflict between Government forces and non-State actors. The problem now is basically the lack of development. It is in recognition of that that the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General of the United Nations have recommended that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur wind down its operation in Darfur and that the role and capacity of the United Nations country team be strengthened in exchange. For its part, the Government of the Sudan is making significant efforts to find durable solutions to the suffering of the people of Darfur. Such efforts require substantial assistance from the international community to ensure their sustainability. We are also encouraged by recent developments in the political process. We welcome the signing of the pre-negotiation agreement for the resumption of the peace process in Darfur. We trust that it will serve as a stepping stone to concluding a comprehensive peace agreement forthwith. We call on the holdout groups to join the peace process without conditions and avail themselves of the positive trends. We have no doubt that the Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council will use their comparative advantages to make refusing the call to join the peace process cost dearly.

Finally, we are witnessing at first-hand the constructive role the Sudan is playing in dealing with peace and security issues in the region, including on fighting terrorism, combating human trafficking and illicit migration, regional peace and stability and humanitarian relief. In fact, the Sudan is becoming increasingly important and indispensable player in the region and beyond. It would only be appropriate for the Council and the international community at large to review their approach towards the Sudan in the light of those developments. It is high time that the undue politicization that has victimized the President of the Sudan come to an end.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Sir, for convening today's meeting. We also thank Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda for her important briefing.

We note the improvements in the security situation in Darfur and wish to highlight the work of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, as well as the efforts of the Government of the Sudan in that area. We must also express our regret and concern about the growing insecurity in the Jebel Marra area, which has an impact on the delicate humanitarian situation and leads to serious human rights violations. We condemn the destruction of villages, killings, forced displacements and cases of sexual and gender-based violence, which must all cease. Those responsible must be brought to justice. In that regard, we wish to support the work of the Prosecutor and her team and encourage them to redouble their efforts in compiling testimonies and other evidence related to the commission of atrocities.

We reiterate the need for States, including the Republic of the Sudan and members of the Council, to cooperate with the International Criminal Court and its Prosecutor in order to allow access to justice, prevent impunity and thereby assist in achieving lasting peace in the Sudan. We deplore the fact that States parties to the Rome Statute have not complied with arrest warrants issued by the Court against suspects who have entered their countries. We remind them that they are obliged to comply with the Court's arrest warrants and provide their timely and effective cooperation.

We recall that the Security Council referred the situation to the Prosecutor for consideration. The International Criminal Court has therefore established its jurisdiction over crimes against humanity committed in Darfur. In that regard, we believe that the Council should have specific procedures to respond to cases of non-compliance and lack of cooperation, with a view to holding the States concerned accountable for their inaction. We support France's initiative in that regard.

Lastly, we recall that, while the Court is fundamental to preventing the most serious crimes from going unpunished, its jurisdiction is complementary to the responsibility of any State to protect its population and that trust in justice is particularly relevant to a country affected by the conflict, such as the Sudan. In that regard, we stress that the mandates and functions of the Security Council and the International Criminal Court seek to reach similar objectives, expressly

aimed at achieving the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The primary responsibility of the Council for maintaining international peace and security and the competence of the Court on the most serious international crimes must be understood and executed as complementary and interdependent tasks.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

I thank Ms. Fatou Bensouda, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, for her briefing on the twenty-eighth report on the work of the Court on the situation in Darfur, pursuant to resolution 1593 (2005).

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the gradual improvement of security conditions in Darfur, after several years of conflict. We also welcome the decrease in the level of violence against civilians, as mentioned in the report presented by the Prosecutor. The improvement in the situation is the result of the good collaboration between the Government of the Sudan and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. My delegation therefore encourages the Sudanese Government to build on those gains and engage resolutely in finding solutions to the root causes of the crisis, in order to restore peace and stability to the region and prevent a recurrence of the conflict.

Despite the considerable progress made, my country notes with concern the allegations of sexual and gender-based violence against women, as well as those related to human rights violations in Darfur. Driven by its recent experience and firm commitment to respect for human rights, Côte d'Ivoire maintains that the fight against impunity provides important leverage for the national reconciliation process. We also believe that lasting peace in Darfur remains dependent upon holding accountable those guilty of serious crimes and human rights violations. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its appreciation to the International Criminal Court for its efforts to promote justice and combat impunity for crimes committed in Darfur. My delegation therefore calls on the Sudanese authorities to engage in constructive cooperation with the Office of the Prosecutor in order to address its concerns.

Despite the efforts of the Sudanese Government to restore State authority throughout Darfur, weak institutional capacity and the lack of financial resources have an adverse impact on rule-of-law, justice and

security institutions. Therefore, in accordance with resolution 1593 (2005) and other relevant Security Council resolutions, Côte d'Ivoire encourages the international community to support efforts to establish the rule of law and build the capacity of the Sudan's legal and judicial institutions. With the transition in Darfur from a peacekeeping operation to a peacebuilding mission now a priority, it is essential for the Government of the Sudan, the international community and the various United Nations entities to work closely and constructively to ensure a successful transition, in accordance with the recommendations of the Secretary-General in his report of 12 October (S/2018/912).

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire, a State party to the Rome Statute, commends the high quality of work carried out by the International Criminal Court and reaffirms its unwavering support for the Office of the Prosecutor in its efforts to combat impunity.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month.

As usual, the twenty-eighth report of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) reveals nothing new. Like all previous ones, today's report did not find anything new to taint its seven pages except by referring to visits conducted by His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Sudan to various countries, as well as by using contradictory, incomplete and inconsistent information with regard to the situation in Darfur. The Council adopted two resolutions on the progressive implementation of the exit strategy pertaining to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The report of the Prosecutor testifies to what was said by certain permanent Council members, namely, that the ICC — which the Sudan has nothing to do with it, like any other State that is not party to the Rome Statute — has turned its mission into a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the situation in Darfur. For example, paragraph 13 of the report before the Council demonstrates that.

The Office of the Prosecutor has undoubtedly received intelligence from States regarding the visit of

the President of the Republic of the Sudan to a number of states in Darfur two weeks ago, and the way he was greeted there as a peacemaker. The Court finds it difficult to reflect that fact, knowing that it is driving a wedge between peace and justice.

Given what the Council has heard, the proper response to the Court is first to work harder in order to entrench peace and transitional justice systems, and, secondly, for all States Members of the United Nations and non-members of the Court to ignore the ICC. The Council saw that a response by a friendly and peace-loving country like Jordan was met by attacks against it and attempts to denounce it. If Jordan had renounced the Court, it would not have been attacked by the Court, as it continues to be up until now, as the Council saw in the presentation by the Prosecutor.

Before 2007, the previous Prosecutor of the ICC, Mr. Luis Moreno Ocampo, believed that article 53 of the Court's statute made him committed to consider peace and amnesty initiatives, as well as mechanisms of transitional justice and reparations for the conflict in Darfur. But after March 2007 he completely turned against those conclusions and convictions. Why? Because after March 2007 he was subject to extortion by certain non-governmental organizations and States that had established the Court, such as the Coalition for the ICC. He totally gave in to the will of those groups and threw the weight of the Court behind pressing charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and even genocide, against the Government of the Sudan and its leaders.

As all Council members know, in March 2007 Mr. Ocampo was involved in the rape of an innocent female journalist in South Africa. He tried to cover that up by dismissing Mr. Christian Palme, who refused to remain silent about that flagrant act. We would like to remind the Council that the Prosecutor of the ICC, who presented her report today, was the Deputy Prosecutor of the ICC then. There are renewed accusations against the Court of corruption, and that was revealed by a media group called European Investigative Collaborations. The Prosecutor is trying to halt comments on the corruption of the Court by saying that she sees no added value of a further independent inquiry.

What is important in that regard is that since 2005 the ICC, through its judges and prosecutors, and because of its rampant corruption, has been trying to make up charges and accusations that appeal to the

States and organizations that founded and finance the Court. It is trying to mobilize them for its interests to cover up its evident failures and continuous corruption. That is what we what we are trying to clarify.

The Court achieved what it wanted through certain vulnerable African States, but the way will not be paved for it to totally attain that goal, which has nothing to do with justice and its natural and legal concept. While the Court does not have the courage ever to press charges against a soldier from any of those influential States, it has spared no effort to press charges against the President of an African State. All members of the Council are cognizant of the noble efforts, internally and at the African level, that the Sudan is making to consolidate peaceful settlements and enshrine the peaceful coexistence principle internally and regionally.

What is important to demonstrate to the Council is the institutional corruption within the ICC, which transcends individuals. That is our purpose: to expose the corruption of the ICC. It is a corruption that exceeds individuals, affecting the institution itself, and it is one that is underpinned by vote trading. Many examples of that can be seen at the level of politics and sports. However, we did not expect to see, even in our worst nightmares, corruption within a judicial institution, as is the case now within the ICC.

The Council heard here in the Chamber, on 5 December, His Excellency President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire (see S/PV.8413) say that, after 13 years of suffering, measures towards amnesty, healing wounds and national reconciliation led to the success in Côte d'Ivoire, something that the African continent and the whole world are proud of. That is exactly what we did in the Sudan concerning the N'Djamena ceasefire agreement of 2004, the peace accord signed in Nairobi in 2005, the peace agreement signed in Abuja in 2006 and the 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. The only obstacle to peace now is the Court, which pits parties to conflict against each other under the guise of justice.

The core of resolution 1593 (2005) is a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Darfur and the restoration of lasting peace. However, the resolution falls short on that objective. The twenty-eighth report of the Prosecutor is now before the Council. It is pointless to read those reports because they entrench the international divide, as can be seen in the statements of Council members,

and they also fall short of the objective of achieving peace in that important region of the world.

We therefore wonder, as some members of the Council wonder too, about the significant progress that has been made in the Prosecutor's investigations in Darfur, according to the report of the ICC. Those institutional contradictions between the principles of peace and justice must be eliminated. We should underscore the established principles of international law regarding the immunity of States and their representatives. We should also, in a practical manner, emphasize the principle of equality among States, which is a well-established and independent legal principle.

We further reiterate that no entity, including the Security Council, can compel a State Member of the United Nations to be committed to any treaty that it has not joined pursuant to its free political will. We should listen to the voice of the African Union which, on behalf of all its members, unanimously and without exception rejected the insult addressed to our continent and its peoples, and the ruling on its leaders that they are fugitives.

The delegation of my country stresses once again the need to fight impunity and achieve justice through our own national justice and judicial institutions, which are capable and qualified, and through free international cooperation. We are constitutionally, legally, ethically and culturally committed to prosecuting perpetrators of crimes and violations under well-established international laws — including the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Protocols, and other human rights conventions — while committed to fight impunity. Article 3 of the Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions provides for the following:

"Nothing in this Protocol shall be invoked for the purpose of affecting the sovereignty of a State or the responsibility of the government, by all legitimate means, to maintain or re-establish law and order in the State or to defend the national unity and territorial integrity of the State."

(spoke in English)

The way the Prosecutor's statement and a few members of the Council referred to the President of the Sudan is of course unacceptable. We are not trying to point the finger at an individual, including the present

Prosecutor of the ICC. We are, rather, duty-bound to prove beyond a doubt the institutional corruption of the Court itself and, on the same scale, the underlying, purely political considerations that drive the Court and reduce it to a mere political tool and remnant of the defunct polarization of the world.

In this connection, we have to showcase the extent to which the Office of the Prosecutor and, in fact, the entire body of the Court are misused and abused. For example, on 17 October the German magazine *Der Spiegel* and other media outlets accused the Chief Prosecutor of lying with regard to her relationship with a former Chief Prosecutor, Mr. Luis Moreno Ocampo, after Ocampo left office in 2012. This is an account of facts; it is not rhetoric. A series of articles in *Der Spiegel* and other European media, partnered with European investigative collaborators, revealed that Luis Moreno Ocampo, the predecessor of the incumbent Prosecutor of the ICC, had owned offshore companies in Caribbean tax havens.

Lastly, it is evidently and naturally incompatible with the duties of the Prosecutor to take or to be seen taking sides in an investigation she is allegedly performing. Article 42 of the Rome Statute provides that "[t]he Prosecutor and the Deputy Prosecutors shall be persons of high moral character". Regrettably, in the wake of her report before the Security Council in June (see S/PV.8290), the Prosecutor of the ICC came forth with former rebels and abusers of refugee status here in New York and displayed, together with them, a t-shirt on which was written "Arrest Bashir". I have with me a photograph of that event. Would it ever occur in anybody's wildest imagination that any legal system in the world would ever commit such an affront and act of complete bias, prejudice and partiality? Again, I say that the Court is riddled with corruption from head to toe.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.



Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8426th meeting

Monday, 17 December 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Adom/Mr. Ipo	(Côte d'Ivoire)
<i>Members:</i>	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

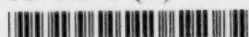
Agenda

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/1092)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/1092)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Ms. Ghizaal Haress, Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution.

Mr. Fedotov is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Vienna.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite Mr. Serge Christiane, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1092, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

At today's meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Yamamoto, Mr. Fedotov, Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and Ms. Haress.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: Today, I would like to focus on elections and peace and to touch upon the outcomes of the Geneva ministerial conference.

First, on elections, on 20 October, an estimated 4 million people in Afghanistan voted in the parliamentary elections. Next year, the people of Afghanistan will also make a critical political choice for their president. Those elections are essential steps on the path towards firmly establishing a representative democracy.

It has been almost two months since the parliamentary elections were held in 33 out of 34 provinces. So far, the results for 29 provinces have been released. Preliminary results show that 28 per cent of the newly elected parliamentarians are women, which is above the quota. We commend the courage and the strong will of the people of Afghanistan in having defied the threat of the Taliban to exercise their fundamental right to vote.

When we look at the elections this year, it is necessary to realize that the preparations and implementation, as well as the management of security, were primarily conducted by the Afghan people, with only assistance and advice from international experts. Compared to the elections in 2005, when 550 international experts were responsible for the implementation of the elections, this year only about 60 international experts participated in an advisory capacity. Also, the Government of Afghanistan bore more costs this year than in the past. The international contribution decreased from approximately \$140 million in 2014 to \$60 million this year.

In the area of security, the threats were real. There were more than 108 verified incidents, causing 400 civilian casualties, the largest number of casualties on a single election day since systematic records were kept in 2009. At the same time, it must be recognized that the total number of civilian casualties throughout the electoral period this year was on a par with that in 2014. We need to acknowledge the efforts of the national security forces, which managed the security primarily themselves this year without the significant international support that they had in 2014.

However, there were major and avoidable irregularities by the electoral management bodies in the preparations and implementation of the parliamentary

elections. It is clear that the electoral institutions need to make significant improvements before the presidential election. The irregularities in and mismanagement of the parliamentary elections will be unacceptable for the presidential election. We strongly urge the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission, as well as the Government, to take all necessary collective measures and to focus intensively in the coming months in order to complete the reforms so that the problems are addressed as they prepare for the presidential election in 2019. It is more important to conduct credible elections by allowing for reforms and sufficient preparations to take place rather than to conduct the elections without implementing the proper reforms from the lessons learned. The presidential election is critical to the future of the country.

As part of our commitment to helping the Afghan institutions deliver a credible presidential election, the United Nations, in response to the request by the President and the Electoral Complaints Commission, will recommend two international experts be appointed as non-voting members of the Complaints Commission. We will also reassess the roles of the international experts in the IEC and determine if more experts are necessary.

The Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations co-hosted a ministerial conference in Geneva on 28 November. Ninety-six countries and organizations participated. The international community reconfirmed that it will continue to assist Afghanistan in achieving self-reliance on the basis of mutual accountability between its development partners and the Government. The conference acknowledged the need for improvements in reforms, while recognizing the commitment of the Government to mutual accountability and a genuine reform agenda, in particular so as to counter corruption. The importance of the private sector and regional economic connectivity were underlined. A joint communiqué and the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework were unanimously adopted at the end of the conference. Another key outcome of the ministerial conference was the assurance of continued international support in the post-peace phase. The international community expressed its commitment to continuing to provide assistance to Afghanistan in the event that a peace agreement is reached with the Taliban.

In the past 17 years, the possibility of a negotiated end to the conflict has never been more real than it is

now. On the Afghan side, a peace plan was presented by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah at the Geneva ministerial conference. A team to negotiate directly with the Taliban was appointed. A senior advisory board representing a broader group of Afghan politicians to support the peace efforts was also announced. On 9 December, a new head of the secretariat of the High Peace Council was appointed. In Geneva, there was a dedicated meeting on peace, where participants reiterated that all international efforts, including those by regional actors and neighbouring States, needed to be in concert and aligned with the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace efforts. The reiteration of that key consensus is timely and important, as a number of initiatives are under way to advance the process. For instance, the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan has been actively engaging with the various parties concerned. On 9 November, a meeting was held in Moscow, where parties from the region participated to discuss peace. Many countries in the region, including the neighbouring States, have also expressed their support for the peace process, which appears to be emerging.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is also encouraged by such developments. However, we understand that they are at a delicate stage, where political space must be allowed for the main actors to formulate their positions and determine how to react to the recent developments. The key next step would be for representatives of the Government and of the Taliban to meet, or at least to formally initiate what in mediation is referred to as talks about talks. We hope that the current momentum will bring those parties together so that they can begin to explore how they would address the many agenda points needed to reach a peaceful settlement.

In this forum, I have frequently spoken of the need to move from sporadic contacts to structured, formal talks. Efforts are under way to bring about that change. While fighting and talking are often a reality in the initial stages of a peace process, it is also the case that actions on the battlefield can have an impact on progress in any peace process. I would therefore urge all parties to the conflict to carefully consider how they can reduce the levels of violence, in particular the harm to civilians. I urge all parties to foster trust and to enable dialogue to take place. I call on the countries in the region in particular to contribute to creating an environment conducive to peace talks, thereby

allowing the people of Afghanistan to resolve their internal differences through negotiations. By moving from contacts to talks, we can begin to move from a logic of war to one focused on opportunities for peace. With that shift we can begin to envisage the benefits of a stable Afghanistan in the middle of a region full of promise and potential for growth, rather than continue to fear threats emanating from an unstable Afghanistan. As President Ghani has stated, there is a need to change the perception of Afghanistan from a site of danger or a battle ground to a platform of cooperation by location and strategic perspective. This is a moment of hope and possibility. Like all such moments, when adversaries begin to engage with one other, it is also a moment of risk. For the sake of a peaceful future for Afghanistan, these opportunities must be fulfilled and the risks managed.

UNAMA's Human Rights Unit has reported that there were more than 8,000 civilian casualties from 1 January to 30 September. That is the same level as that of last year. Child casualties remain high, with 2,136 recorded for the same period. Efforts must be made by all concerned to reduce the casualties. Almost 60 per cent of the casualties were caused by suicide attacks and ground engagements. The increase in the direct targeting of civilians by anti-Government elements this year is a concern for us. We also note the significant increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations. UNAMA also recorded 1,513 civilian casualties from suicide and other improvised-explosive-device attacks claimed by Da'esh/ISIL this year. That is a more than a three-fold increase for the same period last year. Given the way in which Da'esh/ISIL has expanded its influence in other parts of the world, we remain concerned about the threats from that group.

Before concluding, I need to mention the ongoing suffering that plagues a large proportion of citizens in Afghanistan. Despite progress on economic reforms, the country remains one of the world's poorest, and it is blighted by climate change. Of most immediate concern are people struck by drought and violence, and the suffering of 4.5 million people needs to be alleviated. The United Nations and its partners are issuing a humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan. Approximately \$612 million is required for 2019, and I ask the international community for its immediate financial support to help people in need across Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Fedotov.

Mr. Fedotov: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council.

As the Secretary-General's statement at the recent Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan conference highlighted, renewed efforts by the international community, together with regional support and engagement, are needed to overcome the serious challenges related to insecurity, poverty and the rule of law. Illicit opium and the criminal economy are among those urgent challenges, as recognized in the conference's joint communiqué, which calls for increased efforts to fight corruption and illicit narcotics. According to this year's *Afghanistan Opium Survey*, the overall area under cultivation remains the second-highest measured since the beginning of systematic opium poppy monitoring and recording, in 1994. The area under cultivation fell this year by 20 per cent as compared with the record level of 2017, and was accompanied by a drop in opium yield, but both decreases can be attributed to the devastating drought that Afghanistan has suffered. Eradication remained insignificant, falling to 400 hectares in four provinces, as compared to 750 hectares in 14 provinces in 2017. As a result, more than 5,000 tons of opium are potentially available for heroin production within and outside Afghanistan, which translates into more than 600 tons of export-quality heroin.

Continuing high levels of supply have brought prices down to rock bottom. The farm-gate value of opium decreased by 56 per cent compared to last year but, at \$604 million, that still represents nearly 3 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. High levels of opium supply mean that there are a lot of drugs that will go to various destinations at a cheaper price. Moreover, Afghanistan remains an important source country of hashish. This year's *World Drug Report* found that Afghanistan had reported 22 per cent of the global total of hashish seized in 2016. Afghanistan is the first victim of that overproduction of drugs, which contributes to high rates of drug use in the country. Up to 200 tons of raw opium are consumed annually. A report by the Ministry of Counter Narcotics estimated adult drug use at more than double the global use rate. That poses a grave threat to public health and safety and hinders peacebuilding, economic growth and stability.

Balanced responses to drug supply and demand are therefore critical to supporting Afghanistan's efforts to achieve progress in combating corruption, money laundering and terrorism financing.

The Afghan Government has taken steps to increase resilience to illicit financial flows and foster good governance. Measures encompass banking regulation, the National Procurement Authority, the digitalization of many processes, including land titling and asset declaration, the anti-corruption law and strategy, the National High Council for Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption, the Anti-Corruption Justice Center, the new penal code, and the law on anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continues to provide support in all its mandate areas, including to address the Geneva mutual accountability framework priority area on anti-corruption, governance, the rule of law and human rights. UNODC is seeking to step up strategic responses in line with the peacebuilding and conflict prevention priorities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). That includes strengthening the interconnectivity of country and regional and interregional action to facilitate alternative development activities and access to international markets. Our Office in Kabul is supporting the Afghan Government in identifying common targets under a regional counter-narcotics strategy, which should be fully plugged in with existing coordination mechanisms.

I hope that we will be able to further strengthen progress, including through the implementation of the recommendations of the special session of the General Assembly on drugs (General Assembly resolution S-30/1), as well as through the forthcoming ministerial segment at the March 2019 session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. As ever, UNODC remains committed to supporting Afghanistan and the international community to address these shared challenges.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Fedotov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Umarov.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I appreciate this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the work of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), pertaining to Afghanistan and the Taliban, which I am pleased to do in accordance with paragraph 56 of resolution 2255 (2015). I am also grateful to

the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for their support of the work of the 1988 Sanctions Committee and continued assistance to its Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team.

The main goal of the 1988 Committee is to deter the Taliban from continuing to support Al-Qaida and its affiliates and to deter Taliban attacks against the Government of Afghanistan, through the use of tools such as global asset freezes, global travel bans and global arms embargoes. At the same time, the 1988 sanctions regime is intended to support the peace and reconciliation process, including through the use of the delisting process and the process of granting exemptions to enable listed persons to engage in peace and reconciliation negotiations and other approved activities. For the credibility and effectiveness of the sanctions regime, it is essential that the relevant procedures be followed at all times, in particular the requirement that all listed individuals require travel ban exemptions, which should be submitted in a timely manner.

In its most recent statement at the Moscow conference on Afghanistan, organized and hosted by the Russian Federation on 9 November, the ending of the sanctions regime was the first demand made by the Taliban. International engagement with the Taliban throughout the year has concentrated on encouraging it to enter a political dialogue, primarily through the Kabul Process initiative. In addition to the initiatives launched by Uzbekistan and Indonesia, overtures were also made through the meetings of prominent religious clerics in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The leadership of the Taliban has stabilized under Haibatullah Akhundzada and his deputy Sirajuddin Haqqani. In its latest report (see S/2018/466), the Monitoring Team noted that the fighting season in 2018 would be at least as bloody as that of 2017. Unfortunately, that prediction has proven to be correct, in spite of the sanctions measures. The Taliban has pressed forward throughout the year with a ferocious military campaign that included the use of terrorist tactics, such as infiltration and targeted assassinations, kidnappings for ransom and suicide bombings. The Taliban was also successful in overrunning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) presence in northern Afghanistan after it was critically weakened by an intense campaign

led by Afghan and United States forces. The presence of ISIL in eastern Afghanistan remains contained through the same factor of combined Afghan and United States military pressure. Afghan security forces have struggled to repel repeated Taliban assaults on provincial capitals, but remain optimistic due to the consistent support and assistance received from the international presence in Afghanistan.

The report of the Monitoring Team also noted that Al-Qaida remains closely allied to and embedded within the Taliban. There has been no change to that close relationship in recent Taliban declarations. The Taliban's finances originate from taxation on the narcotics economy and the illegal extraction of natural resources. The impact of the assets freeze on the Taliban's illegal activities will only be intensified once additional information is gathered on where the Taliban and its financial backers have invested their illicit proceeds from the narcotics economy and illegal exportation of illegally mined mineral resources, such as onyx marble, chromite, talc, gemstones and gold.

While there are many structures and frameworks in place for the implementation of the 1988 sanctions regime, the effectiveness of its implementation depends not only on internal, but also regional and international actors. The Committee would therefore like to encourage Member States to play a more active role in providing information that would help to maintain the sanctions list as up-to-date as possible and to assist the Committee in the implementation of the sanctions measures in order to enhance its effectiveness.

The overall effectiveness of the 1988 sanctions measures also relies on close coordination with the Government of Afghanistan and other actors in the region. I travelled to Afghanistan last year, and again this year as part of the Council's visit in January. I remain convinced that there is potential for greater use of the 1988 sanctions regime to deter the Taliban and support the peace process. Renewed efforts are also needed to list individuals and entities associated with the Taliban who are not yet on the sanctions list, but who carry out activities that are harmful to the peace and security of Afghanistan.

The Committee is keen to assist the Government of Afghanistan in making wider use of the tools offered by the 1988 sanctions regime. Throughout 2018, the Government of Afghanistan made overtures for peace with the Taliban, including the offer in

February of negotiations without preconditions and the establishment of ceasefires in June and August. I thank the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his briefing to the Committee in October and for his regular support of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in its three visits to Afghanistan.

The Committee looks forward to continued close engagement with UNAMA, Afghanistan and other States in the region under the chairmanship of Indonesia in 2019.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Haress.

Ms. Haress: I speak today as a professional Afghan woman who has worked for decades to advance human rights, economic empowerment and democracy in my country. I am also a member of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution. I am here to brief the Security Council on the recent political developments in Afghanistan. My statement will address the recent and upcoming elections, the role of women and youth in the peace talks and the crucial importance of adhering to the constitutional framework in the current peace negotiations in order to protect the civil liberties of Afghan citizens and put my country on the road to democracy.

Afghan citizens defied threats of violence to participate in the long-overdue parliamentary elections of 20 October. Four million Afghans — women and men, young and old, urban and rural — came out to vote. Women, who went to the polling centres to fulfil their civic duty at great personal risk, constituted 34 per cent of voters. The participation of Afghan youth was also noteworthy — young women and men ran for office across the country, promising a more educated Parliament that would be less paralysed by corruption.

In a country scarred by ongoing conflict, the strong participation of citizens in this election was a significant achievement and an assurance that democratic institutions would be established, in accordance with the Constitution. However, the elections were also marred by significant challenges that must be addressed before the presidential elections in April 2019. The risk of violence before and on election day led to many polling centres remaining closed. At other

centres across the country, voters were killed or injured by militant attacks, roadside bombs or suicide bombers.

In addition to those grave security threats, there was widespread disappointment at the underperformance of the Independent Election Commission. Voters complained about technical and organizational problems, including the late opening of polling centres, the absence of electoral staff and materials and technical difficulties with the use of biometrics machines, which were intended to prevent fraud. Thousands of complaints have been registered with the Electoral Complaints Commission and other related monitoring institutions, which reflect the inability of those bodies to fulfil their obligations. It is vital that those challenges be addressed prior to the upcoming presidential elections.

Afghanistan has suffered from war throughout most of its recent history. Conflict has killed thousands of Afghans, destroyed villages and infrastructure and forced many to flee their homes. Peacebuilding is therefore an urgent priority. Positive developments, such as recent political agreements with the Taliban, have given many Afghans hope. However, those negotiations have also raised serious concerns regarding the meaningful participation of women and youth in the ensuing peace process.

Article 22 of the Constitution of Afghanistan guarantees the equality of women and men before the law. Women have seen major advances in recent years, including in basic access to education, health and work, and have significantly contributed to the development of post-Taliban Afghanistan.

However, despite the important role that women have played in bringing about social change in the country, gender inequality and numerous barriers to their meaningful participation persist. Afghan women suffer from violence, insecurity and lack of access to justice.

Given the history of the Taliban in Afghanistan, building sustainable peace while preventing the re-establishment of extremist rule depends on the meaningful inclusion of women. To ensure sustainable peace, those affected by the conflict must be an important part of the peace process, both in negotiations and in envisioning solutions. It is therefore vital that the Government engage civil society and ordinary Afghans from all walks of life so that they have a say in the

future of their country and feel ownership over the decisions that will determine it.

The Government must ensure that any continuing obstacles to the participation of women in all spheres of public and political life are eliminated and that their inclusion is a non-negotiable priority. Women must have formal, substantive and specific roles at every level of the peace process. In addition, youth, the generation that will bear the consequences of the current peace process, must also be consulted, have direct access to the negotiating table and be included in the peace agreements. The Government of Afghanistan must also ensure transparency and keep citizens informed of any developments in the peace process.

The establishment of the Constitution in 2004 marked a significant break from Afghanistan's decades of war and lawlessness. Despite the years of conflict following the adoption of the Constitution, Afghanistan has made modest progress with regard to the rule of law, democratic governance and human rights, particularly women's rights. However, this progress has been placed in serious jeopardy by repeated suggestions that the Constitution be amended to accommodate the demands of the Taliban. Such suggestions raise concerns over preserving democratic governance, the protection of human rights and the separation of powers as enshrined in the Afghan Constitution.

Afghanistan's Constitution allows amendments to fundamental rights only if the objective is to improve them. On election day, the Taliban attempted to intimidate people into staying home and deemed the democratic process a sham. It is therefore clear that the Taliban's intent to make amendments would not improve the Constitution but instead result in bartering away the rights and freedoms for which we have fought for 17 years. Making changes to the Constitution in order to negotiate peace is a red line we must not cross.

I therefore urge the Security Council to ensure that all peace negotiations or talks adhere to the framework of the current Constitution. Any compromise concerning citizens' rights and liberties would erase the hard-won gains of nearly two decades. The cost would be borne not only by the international community, but also by ordinary Afghans, as the hope they felt in the recent elections for a democratic Afghanistan would be cruelly snatched from them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Haress for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. We also welcome the presence of our worthy colleague, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto; Mr. Fedotov of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; and Ms. Ghizal Haress, from our country's civil society.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/1092), which provides a useful update on the overall situation in Afghanistan.

Today's meeting is being held against the backdrop of important developments. These include the renewed international partnership as affirmed by the Geneva Ministerial Conference and the adoption of the General Assembly's resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan, two weeks ago; new measures in the context of Afghan-led peace efforts, supported by regional and global partners; and sustained progress by our National Defence and Security Forces in their fight against regional and global terrorist groups, as well as enhanced economic cooperation by virtue of regional connectivity projects. Moreover, our parliamentary elections were, in spite of the challenges, another opportunity where our people, through ballots, took another step towards the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law.

This series of events provide a clear picture of the way in which our people have been turning the corner in their difficult journey towards stability and self-reliance. The United Nations played a crucial role in co-chairing the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan and supporting our parliamentary elections, for which we are very thankful.

In the area of security, our national security forces have, at great sacrifice, kept terrorist elements at bay throughout Afghanistan. The Taliban and affiliate groups failed to register real gains anywhere in the country. Attacks aimed at capturing territory, including provincial capitals, were foiled, with massive casualties in enemy ranks. Consequently, these groups, including foreign terrorist fighters, resorted to new levels of brutality, with increased numbers of cowardly terrorist attacks on population centres, leading to a dramatic increase in civilian casualties.

In the face of these atrocities, our people stand defiant in pursuit of peace and democracy. That commitment was made evident by the more than 4 million Afghans, over 45 per cent of registered voters, who came out on election day to cast their vote, despite all of the threats and attacks in various parts of the country. Every candidate and every voter was a target of the Taliban. As we await the final results of the parliamentary elections, our next focus is to address existing shortcomings to ensure success in the presidential elections currently scheduled for April next year.

Our people have embraced and were inspired by the international community's renewed partnership and support for a number of imperatives that are crucial to our ultimate success. Among the most important issues discussed in Geneva were our peace efforts, presented by President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah in the context of the road map for peace, which was deliberated on at great length. We have fostered an unprecedented level of consensus on the imperative of peace nationally, regionally and internationally. Internally, an extensive consultative process culminated in the creation of a negotiating team and an Advisory Board that will provide strategic input on various aspects and stages of the peace talks once they begin. I just learned this morning that the Board held its first meeting today.

Regionally, a number of additional countries have stood behind our efforts, recognizing that the prospect of peace is now within reach. Internationally, we welcome the efforts of the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, which has brought new momentum to the peace efforts.

We welcome all forms of support for peace and underline that all such initiatives should be under the purview of Afghanistan's leadership of the process. Let me reaffirm to the Council that we seek a peace that is durable, with increased political, social and economic opportunities for our people: a peace that protects human rights, especially women's rights, and consolidates the gains of the past 17 years and a peace that keeps Afghanistan friendly to the region and to the world at large. Any misuse, abuse or instrumentalization of the peace process, by anyone, will not be tolerated by the people of Afghanistan, who have paid a heavy price over the past 40 years of imposed conflicts.

That notwithstanding, the imperative of genuine and tangible regional support for peace is of crucial

importance. We have always asserted that the Government of Pakistan has a particularly important role to play, given its leverage over key Taliban figures. Support for peace is one of the key commitments stipulated in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, which entered into force in April. The Action Plan constitutes an important framework to effectively counter terrorism, help advance peace and avoid territorial violations. Nevertheless, progress on various fronts has thus far been elusive.

Last Saturday, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China gathered at the level of Foreign Ministers in Kabul for the second round of the trilateral dialogue platform, where discussions centred on tangible measures to build trust by addressing outstanding issues, mainly focused on countering terrorism to reduce violence in Afghanistan. With regard to peace efforts, we reiterated our request from Pakistan to do what is necessary to facilitate direct talks. With regard to security, we asserted that mutual trust and confidence are possible only when we see a reduction in violence and more tangible measures taken against terrorist elements. We hope to see visible progress in the coming weeks and months based on new commitments made, as well as the expectations of our people and the international community.

Afghanistan's worst drought this century has affected our people and lead to food insecurity, internal displacement and other drastic humanitarian implications. We appeal to the international community to help provide the support needed in order to alleviate this alarming situation, including through contributions to the emergency appeal launched by the United Nations. Amid the challenges facing Afghanistan, adequately addressing the humanitarian crisis should not be overlooked.

The Security Council visited Kabul under the Kazakhstan presidency in January and made a strong pledge to improve coordination and consensus on security and development in Afghanistan. What followed was a high-level ministerial meeting of the Council on building regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development (see S/PV.8162). That was seminal in setting a trend to approach Afghanistan's security from a development perspective. It reinforced a sharpening focus among a broad range of regional partners to advance numerous mega-projects, primarily under the Afghan-led Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and Heart of Asia Process.

Last week, in a historic event, President Ghani inaugurated the long-awaited Lapis Lazuli Corridor project, signed by Foreign Minister Rabbani and his Turkmen, Azeri, Georgian and Turkish counterparts in Ashgabat in November 2017. That landmark project reinstates the old trade route in its modern version, transporting famous Afghan products to Turkey and to European markets through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Moreover, since last year, we have operationalized air cargo corridors with India, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Europe, the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and China, leading to a substantial increase in the export of Afghan products abroad. The Chabahar port remains an important gateway for providing commercially viable access to the sea, linking the Indian Ocean with Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond. In that regard, we appreciate the collaboration and flexibility of our strategic partner, the United States, in working with Afghanistan, Iran and India towards exempting the port from its sanctions. We also witnessed this year the implementation of the Afghanistan section of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, which will revolutionize the energy sector in those four countries.

Experience has shown that progress on all fronts — from development and security to economic prosperity and social development — in Afghanistan and elsewhere is best achieved in an atmosphere of amity, unity of purpose, mutual trust and cooperation for the common good. Afghanistan is a rare example of a mission on which various countries, and from different political blocs and security architectures, have converged for a collective purpose, namely, to ensure that Afghanistan is secure and stable and, through that, to promote regional and global peace and security.

We are pleased that that imperative is reflected in General Assembly resolution 73/88, on the situation in Afghanistan, adopted two weeks ago. It emphasizes that threats to stability and development in Afghanistan and the region require closer and more coordinated cooperation, as well as greater coherence and complementarity of approach between countries of the region and the international community, for the long-term peace, security, prosperity and sustainable development of the country. In that regard, it underscores the standing of Afghanistan as a platform for such international cooperation. That offers the surest guarantee for completing the mission upon which

we all embarked 17 years ago. In that objective, there must be no space whatsoever for seeing Afghanistan as a site of danger and a battle ground for proxy warfare, but rather as a platform of cooperation and cordiality by virtue of location and strategic perspective.

As we approach the new year, two issues are crucially important for our shared success. First, the political transition must be transparent, inclusive, embraced by the Afghan people and lead to the strengthening of our national unity and political stability. We look forward to the completion of the transition, which will give birth to a new and re-energized Parliament and Government. Secondly, in relation to the peace process, its outcome should provide the basis for durable peace, while preserving our many democratic gains across various spectrums and, above all, ensure that our country remains on the trajectory of progress, democracy and development. We count on the support of the Council and all of our international partners for our joint success.

Let me end with a note of thanks and gratitude to the outgoing members of the Council — Bolivia, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands and Sweden. We are particularly grateful to the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations for all its efforts as penholder on Afghanistan in the Security Council this year. We enjoyed a great level of collaboration between our two Permanent Missions on all relevant issues related to the Council's work on Afghanistan. We also thank Kazakhstan for facilitating the Council visit to Afghanistan in January and for playing a positive role in the peace, security and development of Afghanistan and the region within the Council.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the new members of the Security Council — Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa. We look forward to working closely with them during their tenure on the Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking Special Representative Yamamoto and Executive Director Fedotov for their briefings. I also thank Ambassador Umarov of Kazakhstan for his annual briefing on the excellent work of the Security Council Committee established

pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). I would also like to express my gratitude to Ms. Haress for sharing her in-depth analysis and valuable recommendations, as well as to Ambassador Saikal for his insightful statement. I also wish to thank him for the kind words he expressed regarding our penholdership, which I shall credit my team for, as they did all the hard work.

In previous debates the Kingdom of the Netherlands has always stressed the need for an integrated and inclusive approach to the challenges in Afghanistan. With that in mind, I will focus on three issues: first, human rights and the rule of law; secondly, the elections; and, thirdly, peace.

This month we celebrated 70 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under Taliban rule, human rights were denied to most of the Afghan people.

Seventeen years since the end of brutal Taliban rule, a great deal of progress has been made, but many challenges remain, as our briefers pointed out. The Afghan people cannot enjoy many of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. We support the efforts of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to work closely with all Afghan institutions in overcoming challenges relating to those rights. That includes a justice system that is able to fully implement the progress the country has made in legislative reform and in constitutional provisions guaranteeing women's rights and the elimination of violence against women.

The security situation also constitutes a major obstacle for safeguarding fundamental rights. In that regard, we are concerned about the continuously high level of civilian casualties. The deliberate targeting of civilians by anti-Government forces is entirely unacceptable; we condemn it in the strongest terms.

An estimated 4 million Afghans contributed to shaping the future of Afghanistan by casting their vote in the parliamentary elections in October. They sent a very hopeful and powerful message. We hope the turnout for the presidential elections will prove to be even higher, with further increased participation by youth and women.

The parliamentary elections showed that improvements must be made to the electoral process. The Afghan Government and the Independent Election Commission will have to do their utmost to ensure that the presidential elections planned for 2019 take place in

an orderly and credible fashion. We strongly urge them to implement the lessons learned, and we call on the United Nations Development Programme and UNAMA to support the process. There must be improvements in the implementation of biometric verification, the training of election staff and voter education.

Also, the Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaints Commission both have their respective roles and mandates, which are separate yet interdependent. It is important that both institutions work together towards the common goal of organizing credible, legitimate and free and fair elections. All stakeholders across the political spectrum need to engage in political campaigning in a constructive and peaceful way, while upholding the highest democratic standards.

Peace is possible, and the moment is now. We urge the Taliban to reciprocate the offer of the Afghan Government to engage in direct peace negotiations. We commend President Ghani for his courageous leadership in preparation for negotiations. There is no alternative to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, supported by UNAMA and the international community.

Besides agreeing on new benchmarks for the important implementation of reforms, the Geneva communiqué once more reiterated the support of the international community for peace in Afghanistan. But peace should not roll back the progress made over the past 17 years, and can never come at the expense of the fundamental rights of all Afghans.

A new generation of Afghans is knocking on the door of a new Afghanistan — young, educated and talented women and men who do not want to return to the dark period of clerical rule. That was put on clear display by Ramiz Bakhtiar, the first Afghan youth representative to the United Nations, whom we invited to brief the Council in September (see S/PV.8354). Ramiz was elected as part of a joint initiative by Afghanistan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was also reflected on 8 March (see S/PV.8199), when many members of the Council underscored the importance of the women and peace and security agenda in Afghanistan, a message that was reinforced by the fact that the majority of Council members at that meeting were represented by female leaders.

The voice of Afghanistan's people is clear: we need a workable peace deal. That will require political courage on the part of all the parties involved; it will require

perseverance; and it will require the unity of effort of the Council. That unity of effort is something that we, as penholder this year, have consistently strived towards. By acting collectively and in an agile manner, the Council was able to give clear guidance and messaging on important developments in Afghanistan, including with regard to the peace process, the elections, the reform efforts and the many terrorist attacks affecting the daily lives of the Afghan people. Outside the Council, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to focus on those important themes and challenges. They need to be carefully addressed along the difficult road towards the sustainable peace and development that the people of Afghanistan so rightfully deserve.

Finally, I want to thank both Ambassador Saikal and Special Representative Yamamoto personally, as well as their respective teams, for their excellent cooperation over the past year. They can count on our continued support, including outside the Council.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): I would like now to take the floor in my national capacity.

We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing and personal contribution to achieving peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. We commend the work and dedication of his qualified staff. We are also grateful to Under-Secretary-General Fedotov for his comprehensive update, and we express gratitude to Ms. Ghizaal Haress from, the Independent Constitution Oversight Commission, and to my colleague the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal, for their statements.

Today we are delivering our final statement as a non-permanent member of the Security Council under the agenda entitled "The situation in Afghanistan". As the President of Kazakhstan, His Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev, noted in his policy address to the Security Council, Afghanistan has been one of the main priorities during our work at the Security Council. We will continue to advocate for peace in our brotherly country, both in the General Assembly and regional organizations, and bilaterally after our membership of the Council ends.

During our membership in the Security Council we tried to focus the Council's attention on solving the Afghan conflict to establish peace in that country and to achieve progress and prosperity in the entire region. We organized two visits to Afghanistan, which was

already mentioned. The first was in October 2017 by the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999), concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities. The second visit was a Security Council visit in January. We also held a ministerial debate in January (see S/PV.8162) under the agenda item "Building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development". Kazakhstan also initiated the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2, on Afghanistan and Central Asia. Those initiatives helped Security Council members better understand the current situation in Afghanistan and seek ways to solve it.

Kazakhstan welcomes the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan, which were held at the end of October. It was an important milestone in the country's path to a more democratic State. At the same time, we express our concern at the increase in violence during the electoral period. We agree with the Secretary-General on the need to draw lessons from the electoral process and take appropriate measures during the upcoming presidential elections next year, both in terms of organization and security. It is important that all political stakeholders take responsibility for the process.

Kazakhstan fully supports the efforts of the international community to assist Afghanistan. In that regard, we welcome the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference and its joint communiqué. We will continue to support the Kabul process, regional structures and initiatives, as well as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan.

We commend our Central Asian partners for holding the Tashkent conference in March, as well as their efforts under the Moscow format. We also take note of the importance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, in addition to the Resolute Support Mission. We co-sponsored resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan, which was recently adopted by the General Assembly. However, all the efforts of the international community must be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned in order to be successful.

Despite considerable measures taken by the Government of Afghanistan, the security situation remains volatile. We are concerned about the increase in the number of victims as a result of large-scale attacks by anti-Government forces and terrorists, including those using improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings. We recognize the serious problems with the high-level of civilian casualties, including women and children, as a result of air strikes. We are worried about the ongoing process of recruiting young men and women for terrorist organizations, as well as incidents of abductions and sexual abuse of children and attacks on schools and medical institutions, during the current reporting period. We welcome the joint efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UNICEF in addressing those issues.

We remain deeply alarmed by the growing presence of militants of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in northern Afghanistan. Despite the losses they suffered, especially in Jowzjan province, the threat posed to the Central Asian countries by their destructive activities remains significant. ISIL militants continue recruiting combatants, including from the countries of the wider region.

The drug problem persists in Afghanistan, even though the years 2017 to 2018 saw a decline in drug production as a result of the drought, per the latest report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in November. The drought affected many areas of Afghanistan and led to lower opium prices. In that regard, we believe it is important to offer farmers alternative ways of growing crops in order to reduce their involvement in the production and manufacture of narcotics in the future.

We are convinced that close economic cooperation among countries of the region and the integration of Afghanistan into the region will enhance stability and facilitate the Afghan reconciliation process. It will help create new opportunities for young Afghans and reduce their participation in organized crime and opium production, which, in turn, will have a positive impact on the situation in the country and in the wider region. We propose the promotion of an integrated three-pronged strategy for Afghanistan based on the following principles.

The first is strengthening the nexus between security and development. That means that investment in trade, transit routes, transport, and infrastructure

development should be seen as assets in promoting stability through enhanced connectivity. We are confident that projects approved by Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project power line and other planned railways and highways, as well as the Lapis Lazuli Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiative, can lead to economic growth and prosperity, which would inevitably strengthen security and stability in Afghanistan. We note with satisfaction the improved World Bank ranking for Afghanistan's investment climate going from 183 to 167 due to the ease of doing business. That indicates progress toward the goals of the transformation decade and economic growth.

The second principle is revamping the regional approach. As threats today are transboundary, their resolution requires concerted efforts, which also happens to be more cost-effective than a country-specific approach. Central Asia is today able to help Afghanistan mitigate its challenges and increase its connectivity to the world economy. Pursuing a regional approach is the way forward to success.

The third principle is enhancing the role of the United Nations by improving the capacity of its agencies to coordinate and operate effectively as one United Nations. That requires a revision of practices both at Headquarters and in the field — a streamlining that is ever more important in the light of the diminishing development aid. We reiterate the importance of enhancing the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the work of the United Nations in Afghanistan and Central Asia through enhanced coordination and cooperation.

We also call on donors to increase their contribution to peace and development in and around Afghanistan. Kazakhstan is working on the establishment of a United Nations regional centre in Almaty to ensure coordinated support to the countries of the region in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, we urge the United Nations and its country offices to participate in that regional development strategy for the benefit of Afghanistan and the region. For its part, Kazakhstan intends to host a high-level meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on Afghanistan in 2019. The goal of the meeting is to develop regional partnerships and discuss the link between security and development.

Kazakhstan attaches particular importance to the role of women in conflict resolution. In that regard, we organized a regional conference in Astana in September entitled "Empowering Women in Afghanistan". The conference focused on sustainable economic growth in Afghanistan through empowering Afghan women, including in the business sector, and regional cooperation with an increased focus on education. The European Union, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan intend to launch a joint project in 2019 aimed at educating Afghan women in universities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The project will be based on the success of our own programme, with a total budget of \$50 million. Thanks to that programme, around 1,000 Afghan students are studying in our universities.

Kazakhstan has made extensive investments in the development of regional transport infrastructure and continues to provide financial, technical and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan supports the principle of solving the problems of Afghanistan on the basis of mutual benefit. We will continue our work with regional and international partners to bolster stability in the region. I would also like to thank all the members of the Security Council for their fruitful cooperation on the Afghan dossier and express our hope that in the years to come we will continue to work collectively to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): The United States welcomes the outcomes of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, held three weeks ago, where the international community reaffirmed its long-term commitment to a peaceful, prosperous and self-reliant Afghanistan. At the Geneva conference, Afghanistan's international partners underscored their commitment to supporting the peace process. We also agreed on the need to look beyond peace negotiations to begin planning for the broader economic agenda required for lasting peace.

Underscoring the priority President Trump places on achieving a durable peace agreement in Afghanistan, Secretary of State Pompeo appointed Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation to lead the efforts of the United States Government to bring an end to the Afghan conflict. In appointing Ambassador Khalilzad at this time, the United States is sending a clear message that we believe peace in Afghanistan is

possible. Now is the time for the parties to the conflict and the broader international community to seize this opportunity for peace.

While we are regularly reminded of the challenge security environment in Afghanistan and the heavy toll of the ongoing conflict on the Afghan people, we have also seen some encouraging signs that point to prospects for peace. We call on the Taliban to establish an authoritative team of negotiators to engage in inter-Afghan talks with the Afghan Government and other Afghans. To fully seize that opportunity, we welcome the decision taken by Afghanistan's partners — and reflected in the Geneva conference joint communiqué — to accelerate our collaboration on the socioeconomic requirements for peace. We urge all of our fellow donors, development partners and all stakeholders to prioritize the development on an action plan for a broad-based programme of post-settlement economic initiatives. That includes a return of Afghan capital, increased Afghan and foreign investment, job creation and enhanced regional economic integration. We thank the World Bank for its key role in working to make the plan a reality. Such a commitment requires broad-based collaboration and can be sustained only through effective burden-sharing among donors, Afghan stakeholders and the broader international community.

In addition to lending support to Afghanistan's peace process, the United States also remains committed to supporting preparations for the presidential elections to ensure that they are transparent and credible. We were pleased to witness millions of Afghans exercise their right to vote in October's parliamentary elections despite the security challenges. In advance of the presidential election, we believe it will be important for the Independent Election Commission to address technical issues based on lessons learned from the parliamentary elections. We also note the importance of conducting credible investigations into allegations of electoral fraud. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan plays a critical role in supporting Afghanistan's electoral process and coordinating donor assistance. We urge the Mission to continue to prioritize its efforts to bolster the capabilities of the Afghan Election Commission to ensure that the presidential election is as credible and transparent as possible.

Regardless of which candidate ultimately prevails, the United States will remain committed to working with the Afghan people and the next Afghan

Government on areas of mutual interest, including the fight against terrorism, promoting the rule of law and inclusive democracy, protecting human rights and increasing economic prosperity.

On security, the United States is deeply concerned that violence in parts of Afghanistan remains at unacceptably high levels. Despite the challenging environment, the United States and our NATO partners remain committed to strengthening the professionalization and ability of the Afghan security forces to protect the people of Afghanistan. Indeed, building that capacity in a way that prioritizes long-term sustainability and ensures that Afghanistan's security forces are inclusive and representative of the Afghan population is an essential element in laying the groundwork for long-term peace.

The United States also supports the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and encourages Member States to fully implement their sanctions obligations. Implementation is key for sanctions to be an effective tool for achieving peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

We also thank the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for again providing a valuable report on the status of opium production in Afghanistan. Despite the reduction in production in 2018, it is clear that the opium challenge in Afghanistan remains acute and will require dedicated focus in the months and years ahead. Our collective approach to addressing that complex challenge must remain broad. Direct efforts to scale back production, including eradication, must be part of the solution. At the same time, we must also focus on supporting Afghan law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, increasing access to evidence-based treatment for substance abuse, and perhaps, most importantly, supporting efforts to help Afghan farmers develop alternative, licit livelihoods. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to advance the implementation of its national drug control strategy and national drug action plan. We also ask our fellow donors to consider ways in which we can support those efforts.

The United States welcomes this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the long-term peace and prosperity of Afghanistan and to the Afghan people.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to sincerely thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General

Yamamoto. I would like to say how much we appreciate his update on the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to thank Executive Director Fedotov and Ambassador Umarov for their briefings. I would like to point out how much we appreciate the presence and input today of Commissioner Haress and, as always, the visionary intervention by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal.

We welcome the renewed efforts towards a political settlement in Afghanistan. We fully support the invitation of President Ghani to unconditional peace talks and continue to urge the Taliban to engage constructively in talks with the Afghan Government. As we have heard, it is critical that the peace process continue to be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led and that it be inclusive. That means that it should include groups that do not traditionally have a strong voice in society, including ethnic minorities. The full and effective participation of women is fundamental. With two-thirds the population under the age of 30, youth must also have a central role in any agreement on the future of Afghanistan. Ms. Haress has eloquently set out why that all matters.

Strong and cohesive international support will continue to be needed. We urge all stakeholders, and especially Afghanistan's neighbours, to engage constructively. The Kabul process, under the leadership of the Afghan Government, is the vehicle that international initiatives should feed into. UNAMA has an important role to play in supporting current efforts, not least to help ensure that the peace process is as inclusive as possible and that its outcome upholds the achievements of the past 17 years with regard to human rights and fundamental freedoms, notably of women. The social gains of past years must be preserved and built upon. As one of Afghanistan's largest and most long-standing development partners, those are issues Sweden will be considering carefully as we calibrate our very substantial development cooperation with Afghanistan going forward.

The Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan last month was a welcome opportunity for the international community to take stock and assess progress. Reports that the anti-corruption framework is improving were encouraging, and it is now important to move forward with implementation. As stated in the communiqué issued at the Geneva Conference, the continued delivery of mutually agreed commitments

will be essential for sustained international support. UNAMA also has a key role to play in supporting that reform agenda.

The timely conduct of inclusive, credible and transparent elections is imperative for stability and for strengthening Afghan democracy. The recent parliamentary elections demonstrated the commitment of Afghans to democracy, as millions turned out to vote across the country, braving obstacles and defying serious security threats. There were, however, serious operational and organizational shortcomings that put the credibility of democratic institutions at risk. It is therefore crucial that preparations for next year's presidential elections be improved at all levels. Responsible institutions must draw necessary lessons and address unresolved issues without delay. UNAMA's capacity-building efforts and technical assistance to the electoral process are vital. We also encourage close cooperation with UN-Women to promote the participation of women in the elections.

Cooperation with UN-Women and other actors is also important for the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, which contains a framework for women's active participation. It now needs to be integrated into existing national programmes, not least into their budgets. The progress made in strengthening the role of women over the past two decades must not be lost. Ms. Ghizal Haress made a very compelling appeal on that issue today. It is not a side issue. It is central to the future of Afghanistan and powerful forces are working against it. UNAMA also has a critical role to play in those efforts, and we welcome the attention given to that issue in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1092), including the use of gender disaggregated data.

We share the deep concern of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General about the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The continuous attacks in Kabul and around the country, including targeted attacks on schools, religious minorities and journalists, have increased the number of civilian casualties, not least among children. Severe drought has caused food insecurity at emergency levels for 3.6 million people. Such climate-related food insecurity is also forcing people to leave their homes, thereby increasing the number of people displaced. Six million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance — almost double the needs compared to last year. The very clear call of the Special Representative

of the Secretary-General this morning on all parties to reduce the level of violence and protect civilians must be echoed by all of us here at the Security Council.

The humanitarian response must also be stepped up and closer coordination between humanitarian and development actors is needed to address root causes. Safe and unimpeded humanitarian access must be granted, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Attacks against humanitarian and development workers are unacceptable. We urge all parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations and ensure the protection of civilians, as well as the protection of humanitarian and health-care workers and medical facilities. The Arria Formula meeting on Friday will offer an opportunity to discuss the protection of health-care facilities in more detail with a representative of Afghanistan.

As Chair of the local Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Kabul, we are concerned about the continued lack of accountability for the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, as well as the sexual exploitation of children. We welcome the leadership of UNAMA in more actively addressing the issue, as serious challenges remain.

Since 2001, Afghanistan has rebuilt its political system, State institutions, infrastructure and economy, with real improvements for its people. However, serious challenges of insecurity, poverty and the rule of law persist. The civilian toll of the conflict continues to be appallingly high. Finding a political solution is more urgent than ever. We may now have a rare opportunity and must not miss it. The renewed commitment of the international community will be important and UNAMA will continue to have a critical role to play. Sweden, as a steadfast supporter over three decades, will continue to support Afghanistan as it implements its reform agenda and takes other essential steps on its path towards development and inclusive, sustainable and equitable peace.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to sincerely thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his briefing on the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092). I would also like to thank Mr. Fedotov and Ambassador Umarov for their briefings today. I join other colleagues in thanking Ms. Ghizal Haress for her insights into the elections process. As others have said, it is very helpful to have her here as we discuss today's important issue.

I would like to start by congratulating every Afghan who participated in the October parliamentary elections, in the face of violence and intimidation. I think they reflect what the Afghan representative and the Dutch representative have both said. There is a new generation of Afghans knocking on the door of a new Afghanistan. Peace needs to be durable and must increase political, social and economic opportunities for every Afghan, as the Afghan Ambassador made clear. I think it is a message the Taliban needs to hear loud and clear from all members of the Council. The Taliban lives in an Afghanistan of the past, which no one wants to see restored. I think the Council can really help to make that message understood, loud and clear. To that end, we call on the Taliban to recognize that in the elections, the wishes of Afghans across the country to have a say in their country's future and their strong desire for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan have been heard loud and clear. In contrast, we are forced once again to condemn intimidation and attacks on civilians.

A number of speakers look forward to next year's presidential elections. It is important that the Afghan people get the transparent and credible presidential elections that they deserve next year. As today's debate and the report have shown, there are a number of technical and operational challenges that affect the elections and that need to be ironed out. Also, the lessons learned and the necessary reforms must be implemented so that those issues are resolved before the next presidential elections. In that context, I want to welcome the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for those efforts and its work to capture lessons learned. As part of that process, I would urge the Mission to consider what more UNAMA could do and what additional resources it needs to strengthen its support ahead of the 2019 elections. I would ask through you, Mr. President, for an update from the United Nations on that issue in the new year.

Turning to peace, recent developments include the efforts of the new United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Mr. Khalilzad, who I used to know in this Chamber. His appointment, the creation of a high advisory board for peace and the announcement of an official Afghanistan negotiation team offer a real opportunity to move the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process forward. To give it the best chance of success, it is vital that all other peace

efforts underpin Afghan efforts in a way that reinforces the indigenous progress. Any parallel process would simply risk undermining progress and empowering the Taliban. I think that General Assembly resolution 73/88, on the situation in Afghanistan, made clear that States Members of the United Nations want efforts to be driven by Afghanistan. Furthermore, they want all other efforts to reinforce the Afghan Government's efforts in that respect. It is critical that the international community give that its full support. It is also critical that the countries in the region give it their full support.

I want to take a moment to commend the efforts of President Ghani and his Government so far and to encourage them, as other speakers have done, to focus on inclusivity, particularly of women and youth, and on ensuring engagement at the community level in electoral and peace processes. I think that what Ms. Haress said about women's rights and human rights is absolutely vital in that connection. It is important that we think about how we might approach supporting Afghanistan's reform and development after any peace settlement, even if that seems to be some time away at this point.

Today's briefing by Ambassador Umarov on the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) reminds us of the important role sanctions play in the pursuit of peace. However, for a sanctions regime to be credible and effective, it is essential that relevant procedures be followed at all times. In particular, any request for travel-ban exemptions need to be submitted in a timely manner.

Others have mentioned the humanitarian situation. We join them in worrying very much about the dire situation, and the food insecurity issue should only add impetus to the peace process. We call on all partners to do more, not just to respond to the current crisis, particularly the ongoing drought, but to help strengthen the resilience of Afghanistan's most vulnerable people in the long term.

I think we all know that 2019 will be a critical year for Afghanistan. There is a significant opportunity for progress on its path towards peace and democracy. The United Kingdom is fully committed to supporting the Special Representative, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghan Government as they continue their important work to help the Afghan people, the Government and the peace process.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we thank you, Mr. President, for holding this meeting. We also thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Ambassador Khairat Umarov, as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), concerning the sanctions on the Taliban, and Ms. Ghizal Haress for their important and comprehensive briefings. I also welcome the participation of our colleague Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, in the meeting.

I would like to take this opportunity to renew the support of the State of Kuwait to all efforts made by Mr. Yamamoto and the members of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), given the difficult situation there. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/1092) on the situation in Afghanistan during the past three months.

We hold our meeting today following the parliamentary elections held two months ago in Afghanistan. I am pleased to congratulate the Government and the people of Afghanistan for successfully holding those historic elections, where the Afghan people showed their courage in the face of challenges, threats and acts of violence by going to the polling centres to choose their representatives in the Parliament.

To accompany that historic achievement, the Security Council and the international community not only followed the elections, but we as members of the Council also welcomed and supported those elections through press statements. Last November, the Geneva Ministerial Conference was held to support Afghanistan, and reaffirmed without any doubt that the international community continues to stand with Afghanistan.

As this year is coming to an end, we must address the issue that concerns us the most in Afghanistan, namely, the peace and reconciliation process to end four decades of security and political instability, which have had an adverse impact on the life of Afghan citizens. The delicate political situation in Afghanistan requires that all wise people and political party leaders in Afghanistan give primacy to national interests over party interests. They must intensify efforts to ensure the success of upcoming presidential elections in April 2019 in order to guarantee a better future and a decent life for Afghan citizens after long years of war and conflict.

The Security Council must also continuously intensify efforts to support the political process and encourage Afghanistan to hold presidential elections as scheduled. In that regard, I join my colleague the representative of the United Kingdom in welcoming the appointment by the United States of Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation. We also read with relief the content of the report of the Secretary-General on the effective and positive role of that appointment on revitalizing the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. We wish Mr. Khalilzad success in that vital mission.

We also express our relief for the efforts made by UNAMA field offices, which have supported peace initiatives in 11 provinces, including supporting the role of the youth in the peace process and settling sectarian conflicts.

In the area of security, we share the concern of the Secretary-General regarding the ongoing instability and the growing impact of the armed conflict on civilians, especially the continuous increase in the number of civilian casualties as a result of suicide and aerial attacks. In that regard, we renew our call to all parties to the conflict to honour their obligations by virtue of international human rights law and to immediately stop targeting unarmed civilians.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait renews its support to Afghanistan in achieving permanent peace and stability by reaching a diplomatically negotiated settlement. We stand with Afghanistan in its war against terrorism. We also believe that the diplomatic efforts must be accompanied by an investment in education. True reform in any society begins with a real investment in comprehensive education system that raises a promising and educated generation that is free from the clutches of sectarianism and contributes to building a safe nation for all. There is a famous Chinese saying on the importance of education that best describes my point, and with it I will end my statement today. If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; and if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.

Ms. Wroniecka (Poland): I would like to thank all the briefers — Executive Director Fedotov, Ambassador Umarov and Ms. Haress — for having shared their comprehensive analyses on the current situation in Afghanistan. Let me also express my gratitude to Special Representative Yamamoto for presenting the report of

the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092) as well as for all the work of the team of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which is helping to promote political dialogue, foster economic development and enhance good governance.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered later in today's debate by the Chargé d'affaires of the Delegation of the European Union.

Let me make three points: on parliamentary elections, the development of Afghanistan, with special attention to climate change, and the security situation in the country, including the threat posed by landmines.

Poland welcomes all the positive developments that have occurred in Afghanistan in recent months. The parliamentary elections, conducted under difficult circumstances, demonstrated the strong commitment of Afghanistan's citizens, especially women and young people. The determination of millions of Afghans to exercise their civil rights was proof of the strength of the foundations of the democratic procedures used. We encourage the Afghan National Unity Government and all relevant institutions to continue their efforts aimed at improving the voting process during the upcoming presidential elections.

Poland has been a strong supporter of the nexus between security and development. In this regard, we took an active part in the Geneva Ministerial Conference, which expressed solidarity with the Afghan people and their Government in its efforts to promote prosperity and stimulate development. It also allowed Afghanistan to show progress and commitment in its pursuit of structural reforms. In this context, we welcome the commitment of the Afghan Government to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the progress made towards achieving Afghanistan's sustainable development goals.

Climate change affects the security situation of many regions, including the region where Afghanistan is located. Extreme weather events, droughts, desertification and water scarcity can lead to the escalation of local and regional conflicts and act as a threat multiplier. Therefore, we must emphasize the importance of mitigation and adaptation to climate change and strengthen countries' resilience in that regard. Proper climate-related risk assessments based on reliable data from the field and better management strategies are needed to effectively address these threats.

As a strong contributor to the NATO engagement in Afghanistan, we are deeply concerned by the recent developments in Ghazni province, which have been experienced as a heroic struggle between the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces and anti-Government elements. The deterioration of the security situation in the western areas of Ghazni province during November as a result of large-scale Taliban attacks is especially disturbing.

Poland encourages the Afghan Government to restore stable security conditions, which will allow the local population to live normal lives. We also confirm our commitment to supporting the Afghan forces through training and advisory activities in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission, led by NATO.

Despite the efforts undertaken by the Afghan authorities, the security situation strongly affects the civilian population. We are particularly concerned about the sad plight of children, who continue to suffer from the violence in the country. We welcome an enhanced focus on children and armed conflict. However, in order for us to see substantial and sustainable improvement, words must be translated into action. In addition, ensuring respect for humanitarian principles, human rights and international humanitarian law should always be an integral part of the United Nations Mission.

Poland remains concerned over the growing number of civilian casualties, including women and children, resulting from landmines and improvised explosive devices. Afghanistan is one of the countries most affected by this type of contamination. In this context, let me welcome the country's efforts aimed at addressing the threat posed by landmines and underline the role of mine action in supporting sustainable development.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Umarov for his dedication to the work of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). We believe that the Committee is a useful tool that can contribute to reconciliation in Afghanistan. However, we would like to underline that the procedures applied to its work have to be followed strictly by all States Members of the United Nations in order for the peace process to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

Finally, let me express our full support for the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan aimed at bringing about lasting peace and stability in the

country. We encourage all parties to the internal and regional dialogue to strengthen their commitments in order to achieve that ambitious objective.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, first of all, to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for his very useful briefing, in particular on peace efforts and the electoral process. I would also like to thank the Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for his briefing on the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan, a very important subject for France. I thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing on the latest activities of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), a sanctions regime whose effective implementation is of major importance in the context of ongoing peace efforts. Finally, allow me to express my special thanks to Ms. Ghizal Haress for her insight into the current elections and institutional issues and the crucial importance of the political participation of women and young people. I will make three observations.

My first point involves elections. The holding of parliamentary elections in October illustrated the progress made in recent years. The elections, in which women took a large part, which is to be welcomed, showed the desire for peace of the Afghan people, who mobilized courageously, despite the threats and attacks. With a view to the 2019 presidential elections, the consolidation of a free, credible and transparent electoral process must continue. The weaknesses identified during the parliamentary elections must be corrected. In particular, the Independent Election Commission must continue to work to ensure the widest possible participation of the population in the elections and to create the conditions for a fair, free and transparent election. Indeed, it is trust in credible institutions and legitimate representatives that guarantees peace. France is very committed to ensuring that the European Union continues to support these efforts, as well as the United Nations and NATO, in order to help Afghan forces prevent and combat terrorism and all forms of violence, the objective of which is to prevent the Afghan people from expressing their free sovereign will.

My second point is about peace efforts. The seriousness of the security situation and the human cost of the conflict should encourage renewed efforts to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. The peace process must be inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-led, and must take the form of a negotiated peace with

the Taliban, with a view to achieving lasting stability. This requires both sides to express acceptable and necessary conditions for an integrated exercise of power within the institutional framework provided for by the Constitution.

Progress has been made, thanks in particular to the initiative of President Ghani, who recently proposed a road map. These gestures deserve to be commended, and France reiterates its call to the Taliban to respond to the peace offer on the table. It is also important that women and young people can participate in a direct and meaningful way. Finally, it is essential that all States in the region unambiguously support the process and that the international community's efforts be both concerted and not in competition with one another.

My third point relates to the fight against drugs. The decrease seen this year is only temporary. We remain concerned about the high levels of poppy cultivation and opium production in Afghanistan. The continued drug trafficking fuels the Taliban insurgency and terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province. It is also a public health issue. Poppy cultivation and drug trafficking in the country threaten the lives of thousands of Afghans. We are aware of the magnitude of the task and the need for a collective approach in the context of the principle of shared responsibility. We count on the Afghan Government to continue the important efforts needed to curb the production and trafficking of drugs, with the support of UNODC and the international community, particularly as part of the Paris Pact initiative. The situation calls for an ambitious response and reforms in the areas of governance and the fight against corruption and organized crime.

In conclusion, allow me to thank the delegation of the Netherlands for its significant efforts and its clear and coherent stance on the Afghan issue during this year. We would also like to reaffirm France's full support for Afghanistan in this pivotal period and for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in support of the Afghan authorities. Finally, I would like to reiterate the importance that France attaches to the unity of the international community in support of Afghanistan. More than ever, we must remain united to support Afghanistan's path to peace, stability, democracy and economic and social development. Together with the international community, we reaffirmed that message of unity at the

Geneva conference on 28 November, and we must now live up to it.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and Ms. Ghizal Haress, member of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution, not only for their enlightening briefings but also for their tireless efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Afghanistan. We express our sincere appreciation to them.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea will look at the situation in Afghanistan from three aspects — national, regional and international — because we believe that genuine tripartite cooperation is the most effective inducement to achieve the peace and security to which the Afghan people aspire.

At the national level, unfortunately, security continues to be the key challenge for Afghanistan. Improving its security is one of the main requirements for achieving stability and long-term socioeconomic development. We continue to note with extreme concern the effects of the high level of violence to which the Afghan people, in particular civilians, are subjected. In that regard, we firmly condemn all deliberate and abhorrent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure that occurred during the reporting period. We urge the parties to comply with their obligations to protect civilians from harm. We maintain that all parties to the conflict must strictly fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law to take all possible steps in order to prevent attacks against civilian and civilian infrastructure, as well as the restriction of humanitarian access.

We would like to mention in particular the treacherous and barbaric terrorist attack in Kabul on 20 November, which claimed the lives of approximately 55 people and wounded more than 60. While we reiterate our condemnation and rejection of such acts in the strongest terms, we also once again express our deepest condolences to the Government of Afghanistan and to the families of the victims.

With regard to the political process, we share the view of Kabul and the Geneva conference that

the process must be led and fully owned by Afghans. By holding parliamentary elections in Afghanistan in such difficult and threatening circumstances, the Afghan people once again showed that they wanted to participate in the democratic process. In that regard, we wish to take this opportunity to congratulate all Afghan women and men on their courage in going to the polls in a climate of terror and constant threats to exercise their constitutional right to vote and to elect their representatives. The considerable increase in the participation of Afghan women by 8 percentage points as compared to the 2014 elections may seem insignificant. However, in the light of Afghanistan's history, we know that an effort to include women and also young people in the electoral process is being made. We call on the Afghan Government to step up that effort so that women also take part in all stages of the peace process. As Ms. Aleta Miller, UN-Women country representative for Afghanistan, said:

"Not only does peace last longer when women lead and participate in peace processes, but also women have a right to participate in negotiating peace in Afghanistan. ... No decisions on the future of Afghanistan should be made without the full participation of all citizens affected by that future, and no peace process will be complete and lasting without the direct involvement of women."

Equatorial Guinea welcomes the significant progress made in the political, economic, social and governance reform agenda of the Government of Afghanistan, including the finalization of 10 national priority programmes, the implementation of far-reaching fiscal reforms and the promotion of women's participation in public life. Given our concern about the high level of violence against women and girls, as well as boys, in Afghanistan reported by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (see S/2018/1092), we hope that both the establishment of a technical committee to review the Elimination of Violence against Women Law of 2009 and the adoption of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework will result, among other achievements, in stronger and rights-based legal protection from violence for all Afghan women and girls, as well as the prosecution of perpetrators of atrocity crimes against the civilian population, among others.

We take good note of the successful meetings held by Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad with various States in an

effort to generate regional support for the Afghan peace process, as well as the outcomes of those meetings.

At the regional level, Equatorial Guinea understands that resolving a number of fundamental issues relating to economic development, security and stability in Afghanistan depends to a large extent on the neighbouring countries and their goodwill, firm resolve and willingness to actively facilitate national reconciliation and to put an end to violence in Afghanistan. We therefore attach great importance to promoting regional cooperation in support of peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. We commend the efforts being made by some Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan, through bilateral agreements to contribute to stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and to its social and economic development.

On the international front, we welcome the outcome of the Geneva conference on Afghanistan held from 27 to 28 November, jointly organized by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, which renewed the partnership and cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community towards peace, prosperity and self-reliance in Afghanistan during the Transformation Decade (2015-2024). We also commend the strong commitment of the international community to continuing to support the training, equipping, funding and capacity-building of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. We emphasize that, in order to deal with the threat of terrorism, there must be a collective commitment to fighting and overcoming that scourge in the context of the global counter-terrorism strategy.

In conclusion, we express our concern about the rampant increase in the production of narcotics. Narcotics provide significant financial support for terrorists in Afghanistan. We are aware of the connection closely linking cultivation, opium trafficking and terrorism. In that regard, we commend the counter-narcotics operations carried out by the Afghan Government, supported by the international community and in close cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which resulted in a high number of narcotics seizures, the arrest of narcotics traffickers and the closure of heroin laboratories, among other successful achievements. Accordingly, as a problem with ramifications at the national, regional and international levels, we encourage the international community to continue to assist the Government of

Afghanistan in its national drug control strategy and action plan.

I would be remiss were I not to conclude my statement by expressing well-deserved praise to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and his entire team, and expressing our appreciation to Ambassador Umarov for sparing no effort in his work as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I thank all the briefers for their important briefings today. As this is the last time during its term on the Security Council that Bolivia will be speaking in an open meeting on the subject that brings us together, I reaffirm my country's commitment to the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

On behalf of my delegation, I underscore the major democratic commitment that the people of Afghanistan have shown in holding the 20 October parliamentary elections, in which the people participated in a disciplined manner. Despite several incidents that could have affected security, they did not prevent Afghan women and men from going to the polls, as planned by the Independent Election Commission. We are pleased to note that, according to the Independent Election Commission, during the three days of voting, 4,812 polling stations opened and received an estimated 4.2 million voters. Turnout was highest in the provincial capitals. We stress in particular that, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092), 30 per cent of the voters were women.

Without any doubt, the history that is being rewritten by the people of Afghanistan is marked to a large extent by their willingness to build a democratic and secure State fully linked to its neighbours, the region of Central Asia and the rest of the world for the sake of its development. We believe, however, that, in order to achieve that goal, there needs to be a greater inclusion of women in decision-making at the Government level and in the economy of Afghanistan. In that regard, we are optimistic about the clear sign of democratic commitment shown by Afghan citizens, especially given that next year — more precisely on 19 April 2019 — presidential elections are scheduled to be held. We hope that the violent actions and terrorist

attacks that blur the arduous path leading towards a consolidated democracy in Afghanistan will end.

We would be remiss if we did not express our deep concern about the high number of civilian deaths this year, the large majority of which resulted from terrorist attacks. The statistics provided by the UNAMA report on the protection of civilians show that there is a clear intention on the part of extremist armed groups to target civilians in highly populated areas. We regret that there were 8,050 civilian casualties between January and September, which resulted in 2,798 deaths and 5,252 injured. In that regard, we categorically reject the violent acts perpetrated by extremist armed groups, which, through the use of improvised explosive devices, have led to 1,065 deaths and 2,569 injured. We were saddened that the violence, particularly during the 20 October parliamentary elections, resulted in approximately 425 civilian casualties — the greatest number of casualties in a single day for 2018. In that regard, we join the Secretary-General in his call on all parties to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and to stop such attacks directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Bolivia welcomed the outcome of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan held on 27 and 28 November, which was organized by the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations. It renewed the partnership and cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community to achieve Afghan peace, prosperity and self-reliance. We also express our satisfaction with the communiqué that resulted from the Geneva Conference and acknowledged and reaffirmed the participants' commitment to an Afghan-led and -owned peace process with the full and meaningful participation of women.

Lastly, Bolivia stresses that there is no military solution to the situation in Afghanistan. We will add our support to any initiative aimed at fostering an inclusive dialogue that is framed within respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of that country.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/1092) on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We appreciate the briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General

Yamamoto, based on the report, and thank those others who briefed us on the topic.

Afghanistan continues to face multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. The people continue to pay a heavy price because of the instability and violence affecting the country. We remain very concerned by the deliberate acts of violence that have been directed against civilians, particularly throughout the electoral process, including the spike in attacks on electoral and related targets on 20 October, which exceptionally resulted in the highest number of civilian casualties recorded on a single day in 2018. Therefore, we condemn in the strongest terms those recent attacks. Once again, we take this opportunity to express our sympathy and solidarity with the Government and the people of Afghanistan for their suffering and loss of innocent lives.

We reiterate our support for the proposal by President Ghani for direct negotiations with the Taliban, which has received broad and strong support from Afghans and the international community. We also take note of the international and regional communities' continued commitment and effort to support the Afghan peace process, including the various forms of engagement with the parties to the conflict. The long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. In that regard, the renewed call made by the Afghan Government for direct peace talks with the Taliban is encouraging. However, that will not make any difference without a genuine response from the Taliban with regard to the peace process or engagement in direct peace talks with the Afghan Government without any preconditions.

We congratulate the Afghan people and the Government for the holding of democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the set time frame despite enormous security challenges. We also commend the people for their endurance in exercising their democratic rights amid high-level security incidents around the election areas throughout the country. Nevertheless, the number of incidents witnessed on 20 October is a matter of concern that could potentially undermine the electoral process. It could also overshadow the next presidential election, to be held in April 2019, if no substantive measures are taken on the early preparation days. We believe that building the confidence of the Afghan people

in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all the relevant stakeholders will be key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the presidential elections. All Afghan stakeholders have important responsibilities in that regard, and we hope that they will demonstrate the necessary political will and commitment to doing their part for the sake of lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development, Afghanistan cannot effectively address its peace and security challenges. That is why the National Unity Government needs coordinated and comprehensive support from the international community if it is to advance its political reform and national development priorities, particularly as they are envisaged in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It will be vital to ensure that the international community sustains its engagement and delivers on its various commitments. In that regard, we welcomed the joint communiqué of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which acknowledged and reaffirmed the commitment of participants to an Afghan-led and -owned peace process with the full and meaningful participation of women. The joint communiqué also reaffirmed the international community's commitment to a post-settlement partnership with Afghanistan, including in the economic arena. It also underlined the importance of deepening regional cooperation in every area, including on the political, security, economic and social fronts, to the benefit of the whole region.

Finally, the ongoing engagement of the United Nations in support of the Afghan peace process, as well as for the country's social and economic development and in the areas of humanitarian issues, human rights and the holding of peaceful and credible presidential elections, remains very important, and we will continue to follow developments in that regard. UNAMA's efforts to promote and support initiatives for peace talks and reconciliation, as well as dialogue and support for social and democratic development, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and leadership, remain very important. We therefore commend its active engagement with the Government, civil society and the people of Afghanistan, in line with its mandate.

Since this will be Ethiopia's last debate on this topic as a member of the Council, we would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Special Representative Yamamoto and his team for all

of their dedicated efforts in support of the people and Government of Afghanistan. We also commend the Netherlands for its role and efforts as the penholder on Afghanistan over the past year.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and for Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Fedotov's informative briefings. We also want to thank Ambassador Kairat Umarov for his important work as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). We support all of them in their execution of their various and complementary duties. We are also grateful for the briefings by Ms. Ghizal Haress and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal of Afghanistan.

Peru continues to closely follow developments in Afghanistan, which we had the opportunity to visit at the beginning of this year. We want to commend the Afghan authorities and the millions of Afghan women and men who participated in the parliamentary elections on 20 October. We emphasize that the large-scale participation of citizens in consolidating and strengthening democracy is essential to combating violent extremism and building sustainable peace. In that regard, we would like to highlight the increase in the participation of women compared to the presidential elections of 2014, and we encourage more women and young people to participate in the political life of the country. In our view it is very important to ensure that women exceed 30 per cent of the total numbers of voters in the presidential elections to be held next April.

However, we condemn the terrorist attacks on the country's population and civilian infrastructure, and we are concerned about the serious political fragmentation that unfortunately continues to foster instability and insecurity in the country. In the light of the upcoming presidential elections, it will be crucial for political leaders and their supporters to conduct themselves maturely, avoiding any exacerbation of differences, fostering a spirit of democratic unity and a rejection of violence and safeguarding the intra-Afghan dialogue process in the quest for peace. We also want to underscore how important it is that the competent authorities work rapidly and transparently in counting and tabulating votes. In order to foster the people's trust, national institutions must show themselves to be effective in preventing and avoiding the problems that result from the kind of technical and logistical deficiencies that were encountered during the parliamentary elections. We also underscore the importance of fighting drug

trafficking, promoting alternative development and combating the transnational organized crime that is yoked in an evil nexus to terrorist groups in Afghanistan, as Mr. Fedotov pointed out in his briefing this morning.

Finally, we wish to commend the efforts of international partners in assisting Afghans in their quest for the peace that has eluded them for so long. Peru believes that the support of the international community and neighbouring countries in Central Asia is crucial to advancing the intra-Afghan dialogue with a view to building sustainable peace. In that regard, and in conclusion, we want to commend the convening at the end of November of the Geneva Ministerial Conference, which reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to consolidating peace and promoting development in Afghanistan. We also pay tribute to the important work being done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations country team, in line with their respective mandates, as well as the work of the Netherlands as penholder on the Afghanistan issue.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his analysis of the processes currently under way in Afghanistan. We are also grateful for the briefings by Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Ambassador Kairat Umarov, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), and Ms. Ghizal Haress. We listened attentively to the statement by Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and we share many of the opinions in the latest quarterly report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/1092). For its part, Russia has the following comments to make.

The Russian Federation strongly and consistently supports the Afghan people in their desire for a lasting peace in their country. Russia and Afghanistan are traditionally linked through friendly relations that correspond to the national interests of both countries and contribute to the stable, multidimensional development of the entire region and the world generally. The international Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, in which Russia was a high-level participant, shows how important peace and stability in Afghanistan are to the international community.

We have been monitoring the tense and unfortunately continually deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, a trend that has also been accompanied by civilian casualties in the Afghan national security forces, and we want to pay tribute to the memory and courage of all who have died in the fight against terrorism. We are still seriously concerned about the strengthened position of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which is filling its ranks mainly by recruiting foreign fighters with combat experience in Syria and Iraq. The militants remain true to their goal of increasing their numbers and strengthening their influence across the country. We are alarmed by the regular occurrence of major acts of terrorism in various cities in Afghanistan, including Kabul, whose victims are Afghan civilians, including women and children. The adherents of ISIL skilfully combine their ideological, propaganda and recruitment activities with their use of information and communications technology. The jihadists' expansionist aspirations, including in northern Afghanistan, are a genuine threat to the security of our Central Asian partners and Russia's southern regions. We want to emphasize that it is unacceptable to belittle or downplay the threats emanating from ISIL in Afghanistan. We await answers to our repeated questions regarding the transportation of ISIL militants in mysterious unidentified helicopters.

We are closely monitoring the evolving situation in the fight against drug trafficking. The drug threat represents a serious problem for the region, the world and Afghanistan itself. We remain committed to providing assistance to collective action to combat Afghan drug trafficking, including with the active participation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. We must maintain our joint policy of expanding the international community's efforts in the fight against this evil. The practical steps we are taking, including through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), are also in line with that approach. Russia remains willing to provide regular assistance to the global Paris Pact Initiative, established under the auspices of UNODC to comprehensively combat the illicit traffic in opiates from Afghanistan, to the UNODC Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries and to the alternative development project in Badakhshan province. We intend to continue contributing to the training of narcotics police from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia. We hope that our Domodedovo joint project with Japan, which aims to

create a canine unit service for Afghanistan, will be an important component of the war against drugs there.

We are concerned about the data in the Secretary-General's report on the increase in the number of civilian casualties, including as a result of the international coalition's activities, as well as the level of losses among the Afghan national security forces in the current season. We regret to have to conclude that the 17-year large-scale military presence of United States and NATO contingents has not led to the stabilization of the military and political situation in the country. The challenges have only got worse.

Afghanistan is on the threshold of important political events, including the upcoming elections. As friends of the Afghan people, we assume that they should constitute a step towards the country's unity and lasting stability.

There can be no military solution to the crisis in Afghanistan. The only path to resolving it is through the achievement of a common Afghan agreement reached by political and diplomatic means. We believe the negotiation process should be conducted under the leadership of the Afghans themselves. We affirm our readiness to provide all possible support to launching it. That was the goal guiding us when we convened a second meeting under the Moscow consultations format on 9 November. We regard that event as a major step towards developing a genuinely functioning collective approach to resolving the situation in Afghanistan and the start of direct inter-Afghan dialogue.

We emphasize the importance of the regional context for the Afghan settlement, and we want to particularly highlight the mechanism of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group in that regard. We see good potential for enhancing cooperation on counter-terrorism and anti-drug efforts between Afghanistan and the CSTO and recognize UNAMA's important role in coordinating international assistance to Afghanistan.

What is happening in Afghanistan confirms that its accumulated problems require consolidated efforts. Close international cooperation is now more vital than ever, especially at the regional level, in order to transform Afghanistan into a land of sustainable peace, stability and prosperity. We are ready to continue working to achieve this goal.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-

General Yamamoto and Executive Director Fedotov for their briefings and their efforts. I also want to thank Ambassador Umarov for his briefing. Over the past two years, under his capable leadership, the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) has done a tremendous amount of useful work, and China is grateful to him. I have also listened carefully to Ambassador Saikal, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, and Ms. Haress, the representative of civil society, and thank them for their statements.

China has been following the current political process and the security and humanitarian situations in Afghanistan very closely. In the wake of the parliamentary elections in October, the political process in the country has entered a new phase. Afghanistan's National Unity Government is committed to promoting socioeconomic development and maintaining peace and security. The Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan held in Geneva in November adopted a joint communiqué and the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, reaffirming the international community's steadfast support to the country in all areas. The international community should now honour its commitment in earnest and continue to aid Afghanistan in the following four areas.

First, Afghanistan must be helped to maintain its political stability. While the parliamentary elections were held in October, the results have not yet been announced. As preparations for next year's presidential elections are under way, we hope that the country's Independent Election Commission can learn lessons and draw on its experiences in the parliamentary elections to strengthen the arrangements for the presidential elections. All stakeholders across the political spectrum in Afghanistan should strengthen their unity, consider the maintenance of national political stability a shared responsibility and resolve their differences through dialogue.

Secondly, the international community must help Afghanistan improve its security environment. The outbreak of violence on 20 October, the day of the parliamentary elections, claimed many lives and ended up becoming the deadliest day of the year. In the first nine months of this year, fighting inside Afghanistan resulted in a record number of civilian casualties. Statistics from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime also show that drug production in the country remains high. The international community should strengthen its coordination and cooperation

with a view to effectively implementing the various Security Council resolutions related to these issues, and should support the work of the relevant subsidiary bodies, such as the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). It should also continue to support the Afghan national security forces in building their capacity to respond effectively to threats such as terrorism, transnational crime and drug trafficking.

Thirdly, Afghanistan needs help in advancing the reconciliation process. The Government of Afghanistan recently again called for unconditional talks with the Taliban and reorganized its negotiating team. The international community should support an inclusive political process that is Afghan-led and -owned, back the Government's efforts to promote peace talks; encourage the Taliban to return to the negotiating table as soon as possible and give support to the Kabul process, the Moscow format and other international mechanisms with a view to making further progress.

Fourthly, we must help Afghanistan achieve self-driven development. The investment and business environments in Afghanistan improved in 2018. We hope that all the country's political parties will work together to advance its development in accordance with Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework and national priority programme. The international community should continue to help the Government and the people of Afghanistan improve their livelihoods, and should respect the Afghan people's independent choice of political system and development path. Regarding development, I would like to respond to my colleague from Kuwait, who made a reference in his statement to a Chinese proverb. China has another saying — that development is of paramount importance, and it is indeed of paramount importance to Afghanistan as well.

As a traditionally friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China has always given support to its political process and its reconstruction and development. As Ambassador Saikal said, the second dialogue between the Foreign Ministers of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan was held in Kabul on 15 December with great success. The three sides reached a broad consensus and reaffirmed their joint commitment to realizing a comprehensive and inclusive political settlement as soon as possible, strengthening the momentum of improvement in the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, facilitating practical cooperation and connectivity by advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, expanding its

cooperation on counter-terrorism and jointly promoting regional security, stability and development. During the dialogue, the three sides also signed a memorandum of understanding on countering terrorism and issued a joint statement on the tripartite dialogue.

In order to help the millions of people who have been affected by drought in Afghanistan, China recently provided Afghanistan with more than ¥60 million in humanitarian assistance. We will continue to use the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' dialogue and the quadrilateral coordination group on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process — which consists of China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States — the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan Contact Group and other multilateral mechanisms to provide support and assistance to Afghanistan in the relevant areas. China will continue to work with Afghanistan to actively implement the memorandum of understanding on jointly advancing the Belt and Road Initiative, facilitating its trade relations with other countries in the region and building its infrastructure, connectivity and socioeconomic development so as to contribute to the security, stability, development and prosperity of Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation thanks Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing on developments in the situation in Afghanistan. It also thanks Mr. Yury Fedotov and Ms. Ghizaal Haress, member of the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution, for their relevant briefings on drug trafficking and on the strengthening of the rule of law in Afghanistan. I also thank Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, the representative of Afghanistan, for his extremely instructive statement.

My delegation commends the tireless efforts of the President Ghani and his Government to give the brave Afghan people peace, stability and development, which they have aspired to throughout so many years of suffering.

My delegation also welcomes the parliamentary elections held on 20 October, which mobilized many Afghans. Unfortunately, the elections were marred by deadly attacks carried out by the Taliban and the local branch of the Islamic State. These incidents negatively

affected voter turnout. My country condemns this wave of violence, which once again reminds the Council of the need to pay sustained attention to the security situation in Afghanistan. We must recall that, 17 years after the fall of the Taliban regime, the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid remain major challenges, especially in provinces under Taliban control. My delegation therefore encourages the forces in the country to further strengthen joint operations with the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in the provinces most affected by insecurity.

An election is scheduled for April that will be decisive for the future of Afghanistan — the presidential election. We hope that it will be transparent, credible and totally inclusive. In this regard, we note with satisfaction the commitment of the countries contributing to the Resolute Support Mission to maintaining their presence in Afghanistan and the pledges of funding for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces until 2024. Furthermore, my country calls for the implementation of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity, which could help to resolve the security problem in the region.

Similarly, we welcomed the participation of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran in the Triangular Initiative meeting, which took place on 12 December in Islamabad, under the auspices of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The Initiative has yielded tangible results in the fight against drug trafficking through the sharing of information and simultaneous operations at the borders of the three countries. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire has always favoured dialogue as a means of resolving conflict and urges the Taliban to firmly commit, within the framework of the Kabul process, to direct peace talks without preconditions with a view to achieving a political settlement of the crisis and lasting peace in Afghanistan.

In the efforts to resolve the crisis, my country endorses the conclusions of a national conference on women's participation in the peace process, which was held on 12 December in Kabul. We believe that the greater involvement of women in the process would ensure that it has every chance of success.

With regard to humanitarian issues, Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees, whose dignified and safe return to their areas of origin is made difficult by

the lack of infrastructure, poor access to basic social services, problems related to land management and food insecurity risks. In this regard, my delegation commends the outstanding work of the United Nations and its partners in helping more than 3.5 million people in need. We therefore urge the international community to maintain its financial support for the humanitarian plan for Afghanistan in order to provide the necessary assistance to the population. Côte d'Ivoire laments the restrictions on humanitarian agencies' access to vulnerable populations, as well as the attacks on humanitarian workers, which are a violation of international humanitarian law.

Côte d'Ivoire congratulates the Afghan Government on its commitment to the fight against corruption and the measures it has taken to stabilize the economy and improve business. My country also encourages the Government to pursue its efforts to combat drug trafficking, which is an important source of funding for the Taliban.

Côte d'Ivoire commends Ambassador Kairat Umarov for his work as Chairman of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) and reiterates its full support for him.

In conclusion, my delegation calls on the States Members of the United Nations, and in particular the countries of the region, to ensure strict respect for the sanctions imposed on the Taliban. This would help to bring peace and stability to this country, which is devastated by a conflict that has lasted far too long.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

In line with note S/2017/507, I remind speakers that they are kindly requested to limit their statements to five minutes, so that the Council can carry out its work in a timely manner. Delegations with long statements are invited to distribute them in printed form and to deliver an abridged statement in the Security Council, because we have a long list of speakers in accordance with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Usman (Pakistan): Millions of Afghans continue to suffer from prolonged conflict in their country. Instability caused by the vicious cycle of foreign military intervention and civil war has engulfed

the whole region and impeded peace, development and progress.

Unfortunately, over the past year, we have not seen any sign of reduction in violence in Afghanistan. If anything, it has intensified. Thousands of Afghans have lost their lives owing to insurgent attacks, large-scale terrorist bombings and intensified air campaigns. We share the Secretary-General's concern about the worsening impact of the conflict on the population, as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan continues to record a high number of civilian deaths.

While the international community is committed to bringing the conflict in Afghanistan to a negotiated end, we finally see efforts to actually achieve this goal. The hope for a negotiated settlement was kindled by the observance of a ceasefire by all parties earlier this year. This was welcomed by the Afghans themselves, as well as their regional and international partners. This could prove to be a watershed moment in the long history of violence in the country.

The ceasefire achieved what military surges of the past could not — peace, albeit transitory. What Afghanistan now needs is for all parties to the conflict to commence negotiations for a sustainable solution. In this regard, we welcome the announcement of a negotiating team by President Ashraf Ghani, as well as direct negotiations between the United States and the Taliban. These meetings, and the recently held Moscow-format dialogue, represent promising openings. Pakistan also welcomes the most recent round of talks between the United States Special Envoy and the Taliban in Abu Dhabi earlier today. We hope that the dialogue leads to a sustainable peace process in which all parties show flexibility to make progress on a negotiated settlement of the war in Afghanistan.

Other than the people of Afghanistan, Pakistan has the most to gain from the restoration of peace and stability in our neighbouring country. The Government of Pakistan, led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, is committed to extending all possible support to facilitate an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Pakistan envisages a future of close economic cooperation in our region, helping Kabul realize its ambition of becoming a regional hub for trade and energy. To this end, during the second round of the trilateral dialogue among the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, China and Afghanistan last weekend, our countries agreed to support reconciliation, development

and connectivity, security and counter-terrorism as the three areas of trilateral cooperation.

At the bilateral level, to support Afghanistan's economy and development, my country has taken tangible steps over the years. Pakistan and Afghanistan are working to improve bilateral relations through the recently agreed Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity. Pakistan continues to facilitate transit of Afghan goods without any quantitative restrictions. Pakistan is the largest market for Afghan products, accounting for over 60 per cent of its total exports. The waiver of regulatory duties last year resulted in a 29 per cent increase in Afghanistan's overall exports to Pakistan. We have actively supported the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, which will not only address energy needs of the region but also generate significant economic activity in Afghanistan.

Over 50,000 Afghans have studied in Pakistani educational institutions and are now working in Afghanistan's public and private sectors, fulfilling their own dreams and the needs of their country. We have announced 4,000 fresh scholarships for Afghan students in Pakistani universities and professional colleges. We have hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees and are not shying away from what we consider to be our responsibility until their safe, orderly and voluntary return to their homeland.

Peace in Afghanistan is difficult but achievable. It is up to the Afghan parties to acknowledge that unconditional dialogue is the only path to peace. There is no alternative. They are the ones that need to make the tough but necessary compromises to get there.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I would first like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and Ms. Ghizal Haress for their insightful briefings. I would also like to thank the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) for their briefings.

My remarks today will cover three themes: regional and international support for Afghanistan, women's and girls' rights and the elections.

First, on regional engagement, I would like to recognize the success of the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which is a testament to the world's continued support for the people of Afghanistan. Special Representative Yamamoto and Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, contributed to the success of the Conference. I thank them. The Conference highlighted the solidarity of the international community as we stand with the Afghan people and the Afghan Government in their efforts to bring peace and prosperity to their country. Furthermore, we urge the Taliban to respond to the Afghan Government's offer of peace and to negotiate peace for the people of Afghanistan.

I am also glad to note the successful adoption by the General Assembly on 6 December of resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan, which demonstrated the international community's enduring support for Afghanistan. At this time, I want to highlight the important role of Afghanistan's neighbours in supporting peace efforts, improving regional interconnectivity and promoting economic development opportunities with Afghanistan.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize Canada's support for the meaningful inclusion of Afghan women and girls in decision-making processes. As you said so well yourself, Mr. President, in your statement on behalf of Côte d'Ivoire, we know that no country can achieve true peace and prosperity without the full participation of all of its citizens, especially women and girls, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. That is why we have partnered with Oxfam Canada on the Amplify Change project, which supports the participation of Afghan women and girls in decision-making processes. To date, Oxfam has helped 680 women and 600 men better understand and safeguard women's legal rights. That work has also included religious and political leaders from the provinces of Balkh, Nangarhar and Herat, and uses both an Islamic perspective focused on sharia laws and secular laws.

Canada commends President Ghani for reaffirming, at the Geneva Ministerial Conference, that the Government of Afghanistan intends to continue to defend the constitutionally protected rights of Afghan women. Canada also commends the leadership of First Lady of Afghanistan Rula Ghani on the empowerment of women and girls. Leadership at the top is making a difference. The success of many women in recent parliamentary elections may be related to those

efforts and leadership. So far, 28 per cent of elected parliamentarians are women — a number that is higher than in many democracies and higher than in my own country, Canada. In our last federal election in 2015, only 26 per cent of elected parliamentarians were women. Of course, that did not prevent Prime Minister Trudeau from forming the first gender-balanced cabinet in our history. But still, it shows that the people of Afghanistan ought to be congratulated.

(spoke in French)

I would like to congratulate the Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission on its gender equality policies and on its concrete efforts to increase the political participation of women. I also note the tremendous efforts of civil society actors, such as the Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan and the Afghan Women's Education Center, for their courage in promoting the rights of women and girls, as well as those of ethnic and religious minorities, during the electoral process.

We also welcome the work of the United Nations and other partners to distribute ballots in rural areas ahead of the elections. We encourage the Afghan national authorities to continue to actively address irregularities and to promote and protect the rights of those in rural communities, especially women candidates and voters, to participate in public affairs. Their inclusion is essential to the integrity of the elections.

Afghanistan recently went through an important democratic process during the October parliamentary elections. I commend the bravery of the Afghan people who, defying intimidation and threats of violence, went to the polls to cast their votes. I also recognize the courage of the Afghan elections officials and the security sector personnel who supported the elections process. We look forward to the presidential election in 2019, and we hope that the lessons learned from the October parliamentary elections will be applied to the presidential election.

(spoke in English)

The next presidential election, to be held in 2019, is crucial to the future of Afghanistan. It is important that lessons be learned from the recent legislative elections. Shortcomings must be addressed. Some initiatives must be taken to ensure that the presidential election is free, fair and credible. All stakeholders have an important role to play to ensure that the country is ready. The

Independent Election Commission, the Electoral Complaints Commission, the Government, the political parties, civil society and the international community must all come together to ensure that Afghans can vote freely and in security. Canada stands ready to help.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): At the outset, let me too thank all of the briefers. In particular, I would like to thank Ambassador Yamamoto for his very profound briefing. I also want to highlight the briefing delivered by Ms. Haess.

These are once again crucial and testing times for Afghanistan. We are entering what has been called the second half of the transformation decade. Germany will remain very active. Germany is the second-largest donor and troop contributor to Afghanistan.

Let me briefly turn now to the Geneva Ministerial Conference, held under the auspices of the United Nations, which we found to be very timely and important. It sent a clear signal of international commitment to Afghanistan and, at the same time, highlighted the expectations of Afghanistan. As others have mentioned, it also demonstrated that this is a moment of opportunity for progress towards peace.

With regard to international commitment, on the one hand, and expectations, on the other, they were both reflected in the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, which set both a clear sign of international commitment and the expectations of the Afghan Government with regard to reforms. I acknowledge the efforts mentioned by the Ambassador of Afghanistan, which we must commend. In particular, I want to highlight what he said with regard to economic connectivity and all the different initiatives he has been taking. I also note the need for reform, to fight against corruption and to build functioning institutions in Afghanistan, as mentioned by previous speakers.

On the elections, I would like to echo what was said very eloquently by my Canadian colleague with regard to encouraging signs, including the high-level of participation in the elections and the number of women who have been elected. I think that that is remarkable, and we must commend the courage of each individual voter who went to the polls despite the threats that they all faced. There were shortcomings, which have been noted, and we would urge the Afghan Government

to take an in-depth look at those. Mr. Yamamoto and Ms. Haress both said that those are irregularities that are unacceptable for presidential elections.

On the peace process, there have again been encouraging signs and there may be a real opportunity to achieve a substantial peace process. We welcome the efforts of the Afghan Government, including the appointment of a peace negotiation team, and we understand that its advisory board met for the first time today. We hope that the Taliban will do likewise, heeding the call from the Afghan people to come to the negotiating table.

With regard to negotiating, I can echo only what has been said by many, including my Canadian, Swedish and Dutch colleagues, namely, that the peace process has to be inclusive. Women, children and ethnic-group minorities have to participate. Of course, as a result of the peace process, we need a guarantee that what has been achieved in the country, in particular with regard to women's rights, is not redressed.

On women, peace and security, from my perspective let me also highlight the importance of peace processes being inclusive. Women need to be included in peacebuilding at all levels. Studies show that peace processes that include women as witnesses, signatories, mediators or negotiators lead to a 35 per cent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting longer than 35 years. Strengthening the role of women in peace processes is therefore of the utmost importance.

The drought and climate change that have been mentioned by several speakers, including Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Fedotov, are devastating. The Chinese Ambassador also just highlighted the contribution that China has made to alleviating the situation. Climate change affects us all, but in a country hit by violent conflict and poverty, its consequences can be even more devastating. We must not let that happen. As a Security Council member, Germany will put an emphasis on the security effects of climate change. The situation in Afghanistan is a case in point, as the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/1092) has shown.

Finally, Germany, together with Indonesia, will take over the role of co-penholder on Afghanistan. We know that we have some big shoes to fill. I would like to commend the Netherlands for its wonderful work and engagement this year, as well as Kazakhstan for the work in the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). As I said, they are tough acts

to follow. Germany will continue to stand by our Afghan friends in the Security Council, the General Assembly, the European Union and, most importantly, in Afghanistan.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Stefanile (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his excellent report (S/2018/1092) and to Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing. We also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Fedotov and Ambassador Umarov for their briefings. Further, we extend a warm welcome to Ms. Haress. Her vibrant call to preserve the integrity of the Afghan Constitution is a powerful and important message.

Those briefings clearly illustrate the complex juncture at which Afghanistan lies, starting with persistent security challenges, which continue to exact a heavy toll in terms of civilian victims and widespread suffering among the Afghan population. Every day, the National Unity Government and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) courageously fight terrorist and extremist violence that seeks to disrupt efforts for peace and stability. Italy remains committed to strengthening ANDSF capacities in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission.

We welcome the outcomes of the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which allowed us to take stock of the progress made in Afghanistan's reform process and reaffirm the mutual commitment between the Afghan authorities and the international community to fostering a future of peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the country. An important outcome of the Geneva meeting was also the shared awareness that not all of the reform goals have been fully achieved. We refer here mainly to the fight against corruption. With a view to the pledging conference that will take place in 2020, the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework clearly outlines the areas where there is scope for further progress.

With the same objectivity, we recognize the importance of the first parliamentary elections held in late October under Afghan leadership. Those elections attest to the tenacious will of the Afghan people,

especially of the many women who participated despite an intimidating climate and terrorist threats. At the same time, taking note of the organizational, procedural and security-related difficulties that emerged, we believe that those elections should also function as a blueprint of lessons learned and help to ensure that the upcoming presidential elections are held in a credible and transparent manner.

The only viable solution to the conflict lies in an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. There is an urgent and unambiguous yearning for peace among the Afghan people, as well as broad international consensus on this point. Those factors have allowed for a window of opportunity, enabled by the unprecedented offer President Ghani made to the Taliban last February, to stay open. Although the brief ceasefire during the Eid Al-Fitr festivities was not a forerunner of further positive gestures by the Taliban, prospects for a negotiated peace in Afghanistan have not been this tangible since 2001, also owing to the positive impact of international efforts.

Italy expresses its full support for those diplomatic initiatives, which, in full accordance with the Kabul process, can lead to concrete progress in opening the way towards peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. We underline, in that context, the positive contribution that can be made by the main international stakeholders, and especially regional partners, in creating the conditions for peace.

Lastly, it is essential that the negotiations for peace, which cannot be achieved at any price, involve every component of Afghan society, especially women, children and minorities, on the basis of a fully inclusive approach. Women, in particular, must be able to play an active role in negotiations and ensure that their rights, enshrined in the Constitution, and the civil and social gains of the past 17 years are protected and further promoted.

I wish to conclude by expressing Italy's sincere appreciation for the clear commitment to this issue by the Afghan Government, as confirmed by President Ghani in his new road map for peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan.

Mr. Mahmadinov (Tajikistan): At the outset, I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations for convening today's

debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his valuable observations and the important work being carried out by UNAMA in Afghanistan under his leadership. I would also like to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Fedotov, Ambassador Kairat Umarov and Ms. Haress for their briefings, as well as the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement.

Of all the Central Asian countries, Tajikistan shares the longest border — around 1,400 kilometres — with Afghanistan. We have very close cultural, historic and linguistic ties with that brotherly country, and that very fact makes it difficult for us to watch, from the other side of the Amu Darya, our Afghan brothers and sisters suffer because of the instability of the past several decades.

I think that there is general consensus in the Chamber on the following three main messages: first, terrorism and extremism cannot be eliminated by the use of military force alone; secondly, the Afghan peace process should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned; and thirdly, without stability in Afghanistan there will be no stability in the Central Asian region, nor will it be possible to achieve progress on social, economic and environmental issues. My delegation also fully subscribes to those points.

In spite of some progress, many challenges continue to exist in Afghanistan, the resolution of which requires additional efforts from the international community. In my statement, I would like to share some of our perspectives on how to address those challenges by utilizing the capacities and opportunities of neighbouring countries.

Terrorism, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking could undermine the commitment of the region, as well as that of Afghanistan, to bring about sustainable development. If not addressed, they will become major obstacles on our way to the timely implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We express our great concern about the recent strengthening and activation of terrorist groups and their activities in the northern part of Afghanistan. In our view, to effectively counter threats emanating from terrorist groups, strengthening international and regional security cooperation is therefore crucial.

In that regard, Tajikistan's law enforcement agencies have been actively engaged with their colleagues from other Central Asian countries and Afghanistan in information-sharing, law enforcement and border control, in the frameworks of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Development Programme, UNAMA, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other organizations.

We welcome the outcome of the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, which led to renewed partnership and cooperation between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community with regard to Afghanistan's peace, prosperity and self-reliance midway through the transformation decade from 2015 to 2024.

As the host of the High-level International Conference on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism in Dushanbe, on 3 and 4 May, we believe that particular emphasis should be placed on the importance of intensifying counter-terrorism cooperation and coordination, as well as information-sharing, border security, legal cooperation and the exchange of best practices. The Conference was particularly timely in the current context of strengthening regional cooperation in Central Asia, and we firmly believe that, based on our experience and the successful outcomes of the Dushanbe Conference, such dialogue should be continued. To that end, Tajikistan intends to host yet another high-level event on this issue next year and invites all stakeholders, in particular the United Nations and its relevant bodies, to join us in order to take joint and effective measures to counter terrorism and extremism.

In our opinion, developing comprehensive agricultural programmes and irrigation systems and providing electricity supplies in rural areas will ensure decent living conditions for the population and could significantly contribute to the decline of drug production in Afghanistan, as well as to solving the drought and food insecurity problems. Tajikistan, with its vast hydropower potential, could be very helpful in that sense by meeting the industrial demand of Afghanistan by providing it with stable and affordable electricity.

In that regard, enhancing cooperation to implement regional hydropower projects is critical. It should be

mentioned that Tajikistan exported approximately 1.4 billion kilowatt hours of electricity to Afghanistan in 2017 and plans to increase its export to over 1.5 billion kilowatt hours in the future. The construction of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project, the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan electricity transmission line project and various hydropower plants, in particular the Sebzor hydroelectric power plant in the Badakhshan region of Tajikistan, as well as the construction of gas pipelines and transport corridors, would further contribute to the improvement of the living standards and well-being of the Afghan population.

For many years, the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, has been actively advocating in different forums for more coordinated action and regional approaches to bring about prosperity and development in Afghanistan. To that end, we consider the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan and the Istanbul Process, the chairmanship of which Tajikistan will assume in 2019, to be important platforms for establishing regional cooperation.

To facilitate trade with Afghanistan, my country, with the assistance of the international community, has built five bridges and established two free economic zones along its border with Afghanistan, which has significantly increased trade between the two countries. Our cooperation with Afghanistan in the spheres of education and the training of personnel are both effective and fruitful. Hundreds of Afghan students are currently studying at the universities of Tajikistan. My Government has also decided to grant up to 1,000 educational quotas to citizens of Afghanistan by 2025. We will continue to render assistance by training Afghan military and border guards, doctors and other specialists.

To conclude, let me reiterate the readiness of my Government to further assist our brotherly country, Afghanistan, in overcoming the aforementioned challenges in order to ensure well-deserved peace, stability and development in the country. Moreover, I wish them every success in holding a peaceful, inclusive and transparent presidential election. They may rest assured that Tajikistan will continue to support the Government of Afghanistan as it implements its reform agenda to gain peace, development and self-reliance during the transformation decade.

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to once again remind Council members that speakers are kindly requested to limit their statements to a maximum of five minutes. Delegations with longer statements are asked to distribute paper copies and deliver a summarized version to the Council.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate on Afghanistan. I also wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his informative briefing and the tireless efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. Let me further express my appreciation to Ms. Ghizal Haress, Mr. Yuri Fedotov and Ambassador Kairat Umarov for their briefings, as well as Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal of Afghanistan for his valuable input.

Japan welcomes the successful convening of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, held in November, co-hosted by the United Nations and the Government of Afghanistan. Japan attaches importance to the fact that, in addition to reform and development, reconciliation was formally put on the agenda for the first time. Japan welcomes the formulation of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework and will support the efforts of the Afghan Government to move forward with its reforms.

Japan would like to pay its deepest respects to the citizens of Afghanistan for their determination and courage in casting their votes in the parliamentary elections of October, in spite of the difficult security situation that they faced. We also express sincere condolences to the victims of terrorists' attacks and their bereaved families. Free and fair elections are the backbone of democracy, and Japan expects that the Afghan Government will review the results and challenges that surfaced at the parliamentary elections and take every possible measure for the upcoming presidential election, scheduled for next April.

Improving security is fundamental to the peace and reconciliation process moving forward. While we have recently seen efforts in the international arena regarding peace in Afghanistan, Japan continues to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

Japan is highly concerned about the severe drought affecting Afghanistan, where millions of people are facing serious food insecurity and a humanitarian crisis. The Government of Japan has recently decided to extend new assistance of \$13 million in response to that

devastating natural disaster. Moreover, understanding the agricultural sector and rural development as key sectors for Afghanistan's development and essential for enhancing resilience to droughts, Japan provided approximately \$15 million this year to improve irrigation infrastructure and water management.

I welcome the fact that the briefers and speakers have stressed the important role of women and youth in Afghanistan. In that connection, Japan has decided to provide approximately \$17 million to promote the *Maternal and Child Health Handbook* and provide immunization against infectious diseases, including polio. I believe that those projects will contribute to saving the lives of many Afghan children, who will lead Afghanistan's progress in the future.

We are at an important and decisive juncture as we near the halfway point of the transformation decade. We should build on what has already been achieved, and Japan stands ready to participate in and discuss with the international community and, of course, the Afghan Government, the way forward in order for Afghanistan to become truly self-reliant.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioglu (Turkey): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Fedotov, for their briefings, as well as the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, Ambassador Saikal, for his statement. We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/1092).

At the outset, let me reiterate our heartfelt condolences for the loss of innocent lives during the latest heinous terrorist attacks that took place in Kabul. We once again strongly condemn those cowardly acts of terror. Turkey stands in full solidarity with the Government and people of Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism.

Afghanistan stands at a crucial juncture in terms of its political, security and economic transformation. As the country approaches the midpoint of the transformation decade, it continues to face significant and complex challenges. The highest number of civilian casualties recorded by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the six-month period between January and June attests to the volatile security situation.

Turkey has been active in supporting the security of Afghanistan since 2001. We have pledged \$60 million for the period 2018-2020 in support of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. As one of the Resolute Support Mission framework nations, we will maintain our support for Afghanistan both bilaterally and through NATO.

Under those precarious circumstances, the engagement of the international community remains vital. We were pleased to see the continued support at the recent Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan. We thank the Government of Afghanistan and UNAMA for convening the Conference, which provided a crucial moment to renew partnership and cooperation for Afghanistan's peace, prosperity and self-reliance. It is now imperative that we live up to the commitments made.

Turkey's development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan has been one of our most comprehensive development programmes. The total amount of our aid exceeds \$1.1 billion. More than 1,000 projects have been completed all around the country. We have pledged a further \$150 million of development assistance for the period 2018-2020.

The Secretary-General indicates in his report that insecurity, violence, poverty and unemployment continue to heavily impact the young people of Afghanistan. We share that assessment and dedicate the largest part of our development assistance to education in Afghanistan. So far, more than 700,000 Afghan children have received education in 85 schools built by Turkey. We attach particular importance to the education of girls so that they can reach their full potential and contribute to the stability of their country. Habibe Kadiri High School for girls, which has operated in Jowzjan since 2008, has changed the lives of hundreds of girls and their families. The ongoing project of the Turkish-Afghan University of Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi in Kabul will constitute another significant step in the field of higher education for young Afghans. We also fully support regional connectivity projects, such as the Lapis Lazuli transit agreement.

The Afghan people need peace, and that can be reached and sustained only if it is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. We congratulate the Afghan Government on undertaking key reforms on good governance, the macroeconomy and private-sector

development. A more focused approach is now needed to implement long-term strategies.

With the ceasefire during Eid Al-Fitr and the parliamentary elections, held on 20 October, Afghans once again displayed their desire for peace and democracy. Improvements to the electoral system and the reinforcement of the fight against corruption will further consolidate democracy across the country. The upcoming presidential elections will be crucial for Afghanistan to achieve stability, security and prosperity.

Enhanced cooperation and increased dialogue among the countries of the region are also necessary. In fact, it is the region itself that has the greatest role, interest and responsibility in establishing and sustaining a secure and peaceful Afghanistan. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is a stunning example of regional ownership for cooperation. The next ministerial conference of that Process will take place in Turkey in 2019. As a long-standing friend of the Afghan people, Turkey will maintain its contributions to the country with a comprehensive and integrated approach.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Yardley (Australia): I thank Special Representative Yamamoto and all of today's briefers.

We congratulate the people of Afghanistan on their courage and determination during the parliamentary elections on 20 October. Despite violence, intimidation and disappointing administrative failures, the Afghan people turned out to vote in impressive numbers and make their voices heard. Australia urges the Government of Afghanistan to quickly address the deficiencies that are evident in the electoral processes and ensure that the 2019 presidential election is credible and transparent and fully reflects the will of the Afghan people.

Just as the October elections demonstrated the desire of Afghans to participate directly in the governance of their country, their call for an end to the conflict and ongoing suffering is loud and should be heard. President Ghani's determination to take the lead on peace through the Kabul process and his offer to the Taliban of negotiations without preconditions demonstrate a strong desire for a new chapter dedicated to peace. Australia understands and shares that desire and welcomes those initiatives. Australia believes that the Kabul process should form the framework for the

pursuit of peace in Afghanistan and the basis for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process.

We were pleased that the international community reaffirmed its support for Afghanistan and for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process on 28 November, at the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, and on 6 December, with General Assembly resolution 73/88, on Afghanistan. Australia particularly welcomes the efforts of the United States to build on the Afghan Government's initiatives in 2018 and bring the parties together in meaningful negotiations.

We are deeply disappointed that, to date, the Taliban has refused to engage with the Afghan Government and has continued its bloody campaign against the Afghan people. We call on the Taliban to end its violence, enter genuine negotiations with the Afghan Government and bring relief to the Afghan people. In the meantime, Australia will continue to stand with its allies and partners in the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission and work with the Afghanistan security forces to overcome the challenges they face. Australia also recognizes that Afghanistan has made important progress, especially on economic and institutional reform. We encourage continued progress, especially against corruption; to ensure that more resources reach their intended destinations.

The Afghan people face natural, as well as man-made, challenges. We have seen this year how drought has affected many Afghans. In March, we pledged \$39 million over three years to support vulnerable groups affected by conflict and displacement, bringing Australia's humanitarian response to Afghanistan to \$89 million since 2014. During the Geneva Conference, we also announced an additional \$5 million contribution to provide emergency assistance to almost 1.4 million Afghans on the verge of acute famine.

Finally, we wish to again record our appreciation for UNAMA's work in Afghanistan. At a difficult time of record levels of violence, we nevertheless look forward to a point when UNAMA can help Afghanistan enter a new era of peace and reconstruction.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ibragimov (Uzbekistan): First of all, I would like to commend you, Sir, for convening today's quarterly debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I thank the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General Tadamichi Yamamoto, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mr. Yuri Fedotov, and Kazakhstan Ambassador Kairat Umarov for their informative briefings. I would also like to thank Ms. Ghizal Haress for sharing with us her perspectives on current developments in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan traditionally pursues towards Afghanistan a policy based on the principles of mutual respect, equality and full support of the Government elected by the people of Afghanistan. Given such circumstances, the engagement in the process of finding an ultimate solution to the current conflict in Afghanistan and the maintenance of good-neighbourly relations with that fraternal nation are among the main foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Currently, Uzbekistan actively participates in various international negotiations formats on Afghanistan, such as the Kabul process, the Moscow format, the International Contact Group, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process forum, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Afghanistan contact group and the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan. Uzbekistan's principled position arises from its firm belief that the central Government in Kabul should be the main party to the peace process. As mentioned by all speakers today, only an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process can lead to a peaceful settlement of the current conflict.

Uzbekistan strongly supports the international community's efforts in facilitating the process of resolving the situation in Afghanistan. In that regard, I would like to cite remarks made by the President of Uzbekistan, His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, at the Tashkent-hosted International Conference on Afghanistan held in March:

"We stand ready, at any stage of the peace process, to create all necessary conditions for organizing on the territory of Uzbekistan direct negotiations between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban movement".

In order to support a reconciliation process in the country, the international community must invest in the economic future and social stability of Afghanistan and its young people.

For its part, Uzbekistan is rendering practical assistance to Afghanistan in rebuilding its social and

economic infrastructure. In Tashkent, we supported projects, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline, the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) and the following initiatives in the areas of transport, communications, energy, trade and education.

First, with regard to the construction of a railroad corridor from Mazar-e-Sharif to Herat, the implementation of the project will provide employment for up to 30,000 Afghans and allow Kabul to generate annual profits from the transit in the amount of between \$400 million and \$500 million. In addition, the construction of the road from Mazar-e-Sharif to Peshawar, via Kabul, remains urgent.

Secondly, the construction of the electricity power transmission line Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri will allow for an increased electricity supply from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan by 70 per cent, or up to 6 billion kilowatt hours, per year. The power transmission line will switch Kabul to the unified energy system of Central Asia. Moreover, the electricity power transmission line Surkhan-Pul-e-Khumri may become an important part of the CASA-1000 project.

Thirdly, with respect to the training of Afghan specialists, at the moment the educational centre for training Afghan citizens is operating successfully in the town of Termez in Uzbekistan. One hundred and thirty Afghan young men and women students attend the centre. In the future, we plan to increase the number of students up to 250. We call upon all countries to unite their efforts in establishing a special international fund to support education in Afghanistan, which was proposed by the President of Uzbekistan.

Fourthly, with regard to the promotion of trade with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has opened an international logistics centre in Termez, with a customs terminal to assist with an increasing export-import and transit cargo flow. Uzbekistan has also created a free economic zone — the Termez Cargo Centre — at the border with Afghanistan, where we plan to establish industrial production lines to manufacture the ready-made items necessary for the projects and programmes that are currently being implemented in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan has also opened trading houses in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, with the aim of facilitating trade between the two countries so as to gradually increase volume to \$1 billion annually. We have also established a direct air link between Tashkent and Kabul to provide

support for bilateral exchanges. An Afghan Consulate recently opened in Termez in order to facilitate exchange between the two countries.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Uzbekistan is making consistent efforts to assist in advancing the peace process in Afghanistan. Therefore, in Tashkent we are strongly committed to continuing close collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan and other stakeholders in that quest.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank you, Sir, for organizing today's debate. We also thank the Special Representative of Secretary-General, Mr. Yamamoto, and the other briefers for their briefings, and the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for sharing his perspectives on the recent developments in his country.

While the situation in Afghanistan continues to cause concern, there have also been several positive developments of significance. Millions of Afghans — women and men — who turned out to vote in the recently held elections, despite the Taliban threat, demonstrated their courage and strong desire to work for a better future by exercising their democratic right. It was a bold refusal to be cowed by the terrorist groups. We commend the National Unity Government, the Independent Election Commission and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, which made sure that the elections went ahead despite the serious challenges and threats. Democracy is clearly taking firmer root in Afghanistan. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General stated earlier, those elections were the first to be completely run by Afghan authorities since 2001. They indeed mark an important milestone in Afghanistan's transition to self-reliance.

Many Member States attended the recently concluded Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan last month, thereby reaffirming the commitment of the international community and the United Nations to Afghanistan. Ten days ago, the General Assembly also reiterated its support to the cause of Afghanistan through its adoption of resolution 73/88. However, that is clearly not enough.

Even as the reports of the Secretary-General have continued to stress that the violence and terror in Afghanistan show no signs of abating, terrorists are

now attacking places never imagined before, including hospitals, schools, mosques and even mourners at funerals. Sadly, one-quarter of all terrorism-related deaths in the world were caused by attacks in Afghanistan last year. Despite all the signs of the deterioration in the security situation, the international community and the Council, with all its tools, have simply been unable or unwilling to deal effectively with the source of the problem.

The Council's actions against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant can serve as a template for action against terrorists and their supporters in Afghanistan. The illicit narcotics, illegal mining and other criminal industries controlled by those terror groups are stealing the resources of the Afghan people and funding ever more violence. The sanctuaries and safe havens provided to those terror networks for years are well known. The activities of the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Da'esh and Al-Qaida and its proscribed affiliates, such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaysh Muhammad, must be stopped. The Security Council sanctions committee, which refuses to designate the new leaders of the Taliban or to freeze the assets of its slain leader, is falling short of what is expected of it by the Afghans and the international community. Based on lessons of the past, we in New York are aware that peace in Afghanistan is tied to peace and security in the entire world.

Even as the challenges of security, peace and development continue to mount, there has also been considerable progress over the past 17 years, especially in the areas of promoting education and health care; protecting the rights of women, children and the marginalized; improving governance and reforms; generating livelihoods and moving Afghanistan towards self-reliance.

India has age-old historical, cultural, civilizational and economic ties with Afghanistan. We are working closely with our Afghan partners in implementing development projects and will continue to do so in this transformation decade. Building reliable connectivity for landlocked Afghanistan is a key component of our regional partnership. We are mindful to ensure that all such projects respect State sovereignty and territorial integrity and are based on universally recognized international norms, transparency and principles of financial responsibility, ecological and environmental protection and preservation standards. It is in that spirit that we are engaged in various connectivity projects

in the region, including the Chabahar Port project and the direct India-Afghanistan air freight corridor, which have been successfully operationalized. We will continue to build on the gains made and to work with all those who share the spirit of helping Afghanistan without conditions.

We support an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled inclusive peace and reconciliation process that promotes and protects unity, sovereignty, democracy, inclusiveness and prosperity of Afghanistan. Any meaningful progress towards sustainable peace requires the cessation of terrorist violence, renunciation of links with international terrorism, respect for the rights of common Afghan people, especially those of women, children and minorities. We hope that the courage, resilience and determination of the Afghan people can be matched by those of the international community in doing what needs to be done on its part to bring peace to that war-torn country.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Christiane: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 Member States.

The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/1092) and Special Representative Yamamoto and the Ambassador of Afghanistan for their statements.

The EU highly values and welcomes the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Special Representative Yamamoto to support peace and development in Afghanistan. The EU also welcomes the outcome of the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan, where the EU was represented by High Representative Federica Mogherini and by the European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica.

Four weeks ago, the EU adopted Council Conclusions on Afghanistan, reaffirming the EU and member States' long-term commitment to supporting the people of Afghanistan in their efforts towards peace, security and prosperity. We acknowledge the current momentum for peace in Afghanistan. We consider the coming months to be key for advancing the

peace agenda. To that end, at the Geneva Conference the EU High Representative made a concrete offer to support peace in Afghanistan, including but not limited to helping the Government to make the peace process more inclusive; supporting post-conflict reforms, including security sector reform; providing incentives for ex-combatants; having the EU as a guarantor of the peace process; and supporting cross-border trade, infrastructure and connectivity. We are currently working with the Afghan Government to develop that offer into concrete actions.

The EU firmly believes that any peace process should include mechanisms to represent the interests of all Afghans, women and minorities in particular. Civil society is also a key actor and can provide important perspectives, not least those witnessed here today. We support a possible peace deal. The EU will stand strongly behind the protection of human rights. Peace must not come at the cost of progress made over the past 17 years. All international efforts to bring peace are welcomed. However, in order to guarantee full Afghan ownership of an eventual peace process, direct peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban cannot be delayed much longer. The international community needs to bring all negotiation formats under the Kabul process.

I would like to address three points. The first point is about reforms. At the Geneva Conference, the international community took stock of the implementation of the reforms by the Government of Afghanistan and agreed on new benchmarks for the future years. The EU signalled once more its firm commitment to that endeavour. It announced a support package of €474 million for Afghanistan, including €311 million for the State and Resilience Building Contract for the years 2018-2021.

It is, however, of utmost importance that Afghanistan focus not only on the adoption, but also on the implementation of reforms. In that context, the EU notes the finalization, ahead of the Geneva Conference, of the development policy framework consisting of the 10 national priority programmes linked to the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, as well as the progress made in their implementation. Notably, progress has been made with regard to a more enabling environment for business and promoting private sector growth, public finance management reforms, trade facilitation, and security sector reforms. We encourage the Afghan Government to continue those reforms.

The fight against corruption needs also to continue and deliver concrete results, which will help maintain and increase people's confidence in Afghan institutions. The same applies for the protection of human rights, with particular focus on areas such as the elimination of violence against women, the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), the protection of children and the prevention of torture and ill treatment. In that regard the EU would like to emphasize the need to implement the law on the elimination of violence against women and to adopt the child protection law, which has been, deplorably, recently rejected for the fourth time in the Afghan Parliament.

The second point I would like to address is about elections. The EU concurs with the United Nations assessment and finds it positive that elections took place in October and that many Afghans — including women and young people — actively participated despite security threats. However, we note that the polling was negatively affected by substantial organizational and technical difficulties, as well as suspicions of large-scale fraud.

For the preparation of the presidential elections, the coming months will be essential to address those shortcomings and draw lessons from them so as to ensure credibility and transparency and to preserve the inclusivity of the political process. There is no need to say that strong and swift measures that will ensure the safety, transparency, accountability and credibility of this ballot need absolutely to be taken.

The coming elections and the peace process are two separate things. The international community must remain firm in supporting both a Kabul-led peace process and presidential elections that are transparent and strengthen the legitimacy of the resulting Government. It is also important that the presidential elections take place on time. To that aim, the EU is gladly providing electoral assistance to the tune of more than €18 million, both through the United Nations Development Programme Electoral Support Project and through a separate project to help reduce the vulnerabilities of the election process. We are ready to work with the international community, especially the United Nations, on the identification of how best to further support the Afghan electoral process.

The third and last point I would like to address is about security. The EU remains deeply concerned about

the security situation in the country, particularly by the high level of civilian casualties — more than 8,000 since the beginning of the year — and grave violence affecting children, as documented by UNAMA. All parties should comply with their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of the civilian population, including women and children, and protect and respect humanitarian and medical personnel, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities.

Considering the scope of the humanitarian needs and the dire situation of internally displaced persons, humanitarian principles must be respected and upheld. The vital role of humanitarian agencies and the humanitarian space must be preserved in order to meet the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable persons. Conflict-related violence must not destroy another generation's livelihood, homes or property, or displace families and limit access to education, health care and other services.

With regard to migration, we would like to assure the Security Council that the EU continues its comprehensive dialogue on migration in the framework of the EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward and by addressing the regional dimension of migration.

The climate-related security risks at play in Afghanistan include water shortages and droughts in the majority of provinces, with direct consequences for harvest and cattle, which in turn risks triggering and exacerbating local conflicts over land and water and increasing recruitment into armed groups. To make our peace efforts more efficient, we need adequate risk assessments in this regard.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our support to the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission efforts aimed at providing further training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions. I would also like to reconfirm that the EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people. The EU remains committed to working alongside UNAMA and international partners to achieve a democratic and self-sustainable Afghanistan.

I have personally been several times in Kabul and I sincerely hope that many kites will soon fly again in the beautiful sky of this city.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Cooreman (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union.

Like others, I would like to thank Representative Yamamoto for his briefing, but also for his tireless efforts towards lasting peace in Afghanistan. I also thank Commissioner Ghizaal Haress, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Yuri Fedotov, and His Excellency Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), for their briefings.

I would like to highlight three points: the elections, the peace process, and the international community's support for Afghanistan.

First, Belgium congratulates the Afghan authorities and citizens on the parliamentary elections held on 20 October, which marked another important step in the consolidation of democracy in the country. It is now important to learn from these elections. The Afghan Government and institutions owe it to the courageous citizens to have orderly, inclusive and credible presidential elections in 2019. Electoral commissions must maintain their independence and carry out their mandates on the basis of experience they have acquired thus far.

In addition to addressing the serious security threat, logistical and technical problems must also be addressed and investment made in transparency and communication. The heinous attacks on schools and medical facilities in the pre-election period further remind us of the importance of full respect for international humanitarian law. In this regard, Belgium remains deeply concerned about the high number of civilian casualties and calls on all parties to protect the civilian population, in particular women and children.

My second point is on the peace process. The Kabul process must form the basis for a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process. Belgium calls on the Taliban leaders to respond to President Ghani's unprecedented peace offer and to engage in direct peace talks. The Afghan Government can already establish an inclusive and high-level negotiating team. The international community,

including regional actors, must support this process by acting in unison.

As the Council knows, Belgium attaches great importance to the role of women in peacebuilding. I am proud to announce a new Belgian contribution of €2 million to UN Women in Afghanistan to support the implementation of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). In this regard, we welcome the technical revision of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is currently under way. Belgium notes with concern shortcomings in the application of this law, such as the use — not provided for by the law — of mediation. We also encourage the Afghan Government to redouble its efforts to increase women's participation in public institutions.

Thirdly, Belgium joins in international support for peace and progress in Afghanistan. The success of the Geneva conference and the adoption of the resolution on Afghanistan at the General Assembly (resolution 73/88) demonstrate the willingness of the international community to unite to support progress, sustainable peace and development.

Belgium is an unconditional ally of Afghanistan through our membership in the European Union and NATO. We will substantially increase our contribution to the NATO mission and also contribute to the training of the Afghan National Army. We also support the humanitarian response to the drought through our contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund, which Belgium will increase considerably.

Let me conclude by paying tribute to the victims of violence in Afghanistan and the resilience of the Afghan people and security forces. The objective of peace is achievable in Afghanistan, and Belgium supports a peaceful settlement led and controlled by Afghans and will continue to support it in the future as well.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kyrgyzstan.

Mrs. Moldoisieva (Kyrgyzstan): At the outset, let me thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Ambassador Kairat Umarov, for their briefings today.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General and the recommendations contained therein (S/2018/1092).

We are emphasizing today the central and impartial role of the United Nations in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, expressing our appreciation and strong support for all of the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Afghanistan. The Kyrgyz Republic welcomes the adoption of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, as reflected in the communiqué adopted at the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan held on 27 and 28 November 2018.

We reiterate our serious concern about the security situation in Afghanistan. We wish to stress the need to continue addressing the threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan caused by region-based terrorist groups and other illegal armed groups and criminals. We call upon all States to strengthen their international and regional cooperation in enhancing information-sharing, border control, law enforcement and criminal justice.

The Kyrgyz Republic welcomes the steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan to promote an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace through the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, including through the offer of unconditional talks, a temporary ceasefire and a request to the Taliban to respond to the call for peace from the Afghan people and their Government.

We welcome the achievements of the National Unity Government in political, economic, governance and social reforms and in the management of the transition. We further welcome the holding of parliamentary elections in October 2018, which marked another important step towards the consolidation of democracy in the country.

Kyrgyzstan considers Afghanistan to be a significant regional partner and attaches great importance to cooperation with Afghanistan in the implementation of regional projects, including the CASA-1000 energy project. That will contribute to the economic development of the country, as well as resolving a number of socioeconomic problems.

The Kyrgyz Republic is promoting an initiative to establish a trilateral agro-industrial consortium among Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. We also note that the education sector plays an important role in the process of restoring a peaceful

Afghanistan. In that regard, we express our readiness to consider the possibility of teaching Afghan students in our educational institutions, with financial support from foreign donors — countries and international organizations. Currently, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and its Afghan partners are implementing a pilot project to teach children from ethnic Kyrgyz families living in the Big and Little Pamir mountains of Afghanistan in educational institutions of Kyrgyzstan.

On 11 and 12 July, at the initiative of Kyrgyzstan, representatives of the countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan, UNAMA and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the issue of deepening cooperation between the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan was discussed. That included the establishment in Bishkek of an international centre for Afghan research and a regional cooperation platform for politicians, experts and scientists to discuss topical issues regarding Afghanistan's development and to prepare relevant recommendations, including on strengthening cooperation among the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan.

In conclusion, I would like to note that we support the commitment of all Central Asian countries to joint long-term cooperation with Afghanistan. Together with our international partners, we are ready to fully cooperate in order to resolve the issues before us.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I thank Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan, Ambassador Kairat Umarov of Kazakhstan, in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011), Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, for their valuable briefings and input.

To promote its political-security conditions and socioeconomic development, Afghanistan needs sustained international support. From that perspective, the recent Geneva conference on Afghanistan demonstrated the international community's unwavering support for the country in its endeavour for peace, stability and prosperity.

In the political field, the holding of the parliamentary election was a successful development despite the security threats. It strengthened and will continue to further consolidate the foundations of democracy in the country. We congratulate Afghanistan on that achievement, which must be complemented by the presidential election in April 2019. Iran stands ready to extend all possible assistance for the successful holding of that election.

We also welcome the renewed efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. Currently, there is a strong national, regional and global consensus that there is no military solution in that country. Therefore, the time is ripe for an inclusive political solution, which should be owned and led by the Afghan Government and people. The complementary Kabul, Tashkent and Moscow formats attest to that momentum, which must be seized. The international community should facilitate intra-Afghan dialogue and inclusive and comprehensive talks. Genuine strong international support and domestic and regional inclusion are the key to success.

Furthermore, in order to lead to a durable solution, such efforts need to take into account the underlying causes of instability and insecurity in the country over the past four decades. One such cause of instability is the presence of foreign forces, which has traditionally provided a recruiting ground for extremists. That is why we have never believed that such forces have contributed to Afghanistan's peace and stability. We therefore continue to urge that all foreign forces, regardless of their mandate and structure, be withdrawn from Afghanistan in a time-bound and responsible way. Instead of deploying foreign forces, every effort should be made to support and strengthen Afghanistan's military and security forces. That is one of the main requirements for the long-term stability of Afghanistan and should therefore be pursued as a high priority.

It is particularly essential to combat terrorist groups, such as Daesh, whose introduction into Afghanistan has led to increased bloodshed and dangerous sectarian tendencies. That alarming and horrific trend needs to be stopped before it reaches catastrophic proportions.

Since terrorism and drug trafficking have always been mutually reinforcing in Afghanistan, a two-pronged strategy to simultaneously fight drug trafficking and terrorism should be adopted. That is essential given the rise in terrorist activities, as well

as the fact that, according to the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, opium poppy cultivation is still at the second-highest level since 1994. At the same time, in order to fight the drug threat effectively, the international community should continue to support Afghanistan's economic development. In that regard, we will continue our assistance to promote Afghanistan's socioeconomic development. Currently, certain efforts are under way to ensure that such measures are carried out in a systematic and sustained manner.

We support the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and underline the need for a strong partnership between the United Nations agencies and the country.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming the resolve of the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue their support to the fraternal people and the Government of Afghanistan in their search for peace and prosperity.

The meeting rose at 2 p.m.



Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8427th meeting

Monday, 17 December 2018, 3 p.m.

New York

President: Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire)

Members:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Edjang Nnaga
Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
France	Mr. Delattre
Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Sweden	Mr. Skoog
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Letter dated 14 December 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/1111)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).

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The meeting was called to order at 3 05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Letter dated 14 December 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/1111)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Serbia to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and request the Protocol Officer to escort him to his seat at the Council table.

Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Hashim Thaçi to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/1111, which contains a letter dated 14 December 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix: Since the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) briefed the Security Council on 14 November (see S/PV.8399), a number of developments in Kosovo have heightened tensions between Belgrade and Pristina. On 21 November, following Kosovo's failed bid to join INTERPOL, the Government of Kosovo announced an

increase in the tariff on goods imported from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina from 10 to 100 per cent. In response, the mayors of the four Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities of northern Kosovo announced their resignations and the decision of the respective municipal assemblies to cease all official communication with the Pristina authorities. The main Kosovo Serb political party — the Serbian List — has organized daily protests, centred in North Mitrovica, that have at times involved up to 5,000 people.

Belgrade, for its part, stated that Pristina had violated the Central European Free Trade Agreement and stressed that it would resume its involvement in the European Union (EU)-facilitated dialogue only once Pristina revokes the import tax. Key international partners, including the European Union, also urged the Government of Kosovo to revoke the tax, while in Pristina Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tanin issued a statement expressing concern about the potential impact of the decision on the population of Kosovo and on the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Amid the tense atmosphere, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted on 14 December three laws, namely, the law on the Kosovo Security Force; the law on service in the Kosovo Security Force; and the law on the Ministry of Defence. The laws do not change the name of the Kosovo Security Force, which would require a constitutional amendment, yet they provide for substantial changes to be implemented over a period of time to the mandate, role and strength of the Kosovo Security Force. The Kosovo Government, in a statement issued following the adoption of the laws, underscored the right of Kosovo to have "an army; a multi-ethnic and professional force built under the highest NATO standards". In Belgrade, the Serbian authorities condemned the adoption of the laws as an act of "political aggression" against Serbia and a violation of resolution 1244 (1999). They also called on the Kosovo Force (KFOR) not to allow the operation of any Kosovo army on the territory of Kosovo.

Among international partners, the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) declared that the transition of the Kosovo Security Force is, in principle, a matter for Kosovo to decide upon. He nevertheless expressed regret at the decision of the Assembly of Kosovo, which he characterized as ill-timed and in disregard of the concerns previously raised by NATO. He also stressed

the continued commitment of NATO, through KFOR, to a safe and secure environment in Kosovo. The European External Action Service stated that the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force should be changed only through an inclusive and gradual process, in accordance with Kosovo's Constitution, and expressed the expectation of the European Union that Kosovo would continue to uphold its obligations under the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations of April 2013 and its security arrangements.

The Secretary-General has noted with concern the adoption of the laws by the Assembly of Kosovo. He underscored that resolution 1244 (1999) provides the sole legal framework for the international security presence, the Kosovo Force, which is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring a safe and secure environment in Kosovo and that "any restriction to the discharge by KFOR of its security responsibilities would be inconsistent with that resolution." The Secretary-General has called on all parties concerned to exercise restraint and to refrain from actions that could raise tensions and cause a further setback in the European Union-facilitated dialogue for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Special Representative Tanin issued a similar statement in Pristina.

The recent developments in Kosovo have further deteriorated relations between Belgrade and Pristina, which have been strained for some time, with no progress on the EU-facilitated dialogue. We are concerned by the risk of tensions on the ground, particularly in northern Kosovo. It is therefore crucial that Belgrade and Pristina avoid any steps that could further worsen the situation, but rather find ways to re-engage in the dialogue aimed at the normalization of their mutual relations.

In adhering to its status neutral approach, UNMIK is committed to working closely with KFOR, in line with resolution 1244 (1999), as well as with other international actors in Kosovo. Under the leadership of Special Representative Zahir Tanin, the Mission will continue to focus its activities, among other priorities, on intercommunity trust-building, which is essential to the long-term normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia.

President Vučić: I am profoundly grateful to the Council for convening this meeting at such short notice. We think that it was very important and very right to do so, owing to the terribly difficult situation on the ground that has led to us face more and more difficulties in the area of Kosovo and Metohija. I have to say that I am very worried, concerned about and even a bit afraid of and for the future not only of my people and our country, Serbia, but of the entire region. I listened very carefully to Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and I would like to say something different than what he said, although I agree with many of the things that he expressed.

First of all, I would like to tell the Council that Serbia has invested huge efforts and great endeavour in maintaining the peace, tranquillity and stability of the entire region of the Western Balkans. We have done everything that we could have done, refraining from responding to different types of provocation from Pristina. We have always been very restrained and we do not accept the kind of phrase that has become customary when two sides are called upon to do something or not to do something. Serbia has done almost everything in its power to implement everything that has been agreed so far.

As the Council members knows, we signed the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations between Belgrade and Pristina in April 2013. Serbia has fulfilled all of its obligations under the Agreement. We made a lot of concessions and it was very difficult for our people to accept them, but we signed it and we have fulfilled it. On the other hand, the only obligation that had to be delivered by Pristina — the only one, and the first 6 of the 15 items in the Brussels Agreement are all related to that one obligation — was the formation of a Serb community. It does not matter whether it is called a community or an association. That was its one and only obligation, and yet today, almost 2,070 days later, Kosovo has failed to put that into action and has no intention to do so in the future.

Serbia, on the other hand, has fulfilled everything, including the police arrangement, the justice and judiciary arrangement, the telecoms arrangement and participation in municipal elections under the Kosovo law — absolutely everything that we signed. But that was not enough. We warned Pristina and the European Union (EU), because we have an ongoing negotiating process under the auspices of the EU, as the Council is

aware. We proposed that we should resolve all of our problems within the framework of our dialogue process. We asked that they not force us into difficult situations that would create a terrible atmosphere between us when Kosovo wishes to join different international organizations, which we consider to be a provocation, because Serbia is the only sovereign and independent State under resolution 1244 (1999), unless something has changed that we have not been informed about.

We begged Kosovo not to apply for full-fledged membership of INTERPOL, UNESCO, the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity and other organizations and international bodies. But Kosovo wanted to do so because it was counting on the support of the United States and several EU countries in the belief that it would win — and it lost. With regard to INTERPOL, in the first round of voting it obtained less than 50 per cent of votes — 76 votes in favour against 78. They then started to blame Serbia, as if it were our fault, as if we had to support them, as if that were our obligation. Of course, it was not. Many countries, important countries in various parts of the world, voted against their membership. But all of a sudden, they imposed tariffs, in contravention of the Central European Free Trade Agreement and the Stabilization and Association Agreement, against Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. First, it was 10 per cent. When they saw that their Albanian public audience reacted well to that measure, they increased the tariffs up to 100 per cent.

In effect, they killed any kind of trade between central Serbia and Kosovo. What is more, they jeopardized the entire Serb community in Kosovo, because that is the only way for those people to earn the money to survive, to obtain medications, to go to Serb-run hospitals and health-care centres, that has always been the only way for them to live.

Not to mention the fact that they violated and breached all those agreements, a fact to which even the European Union (EU) made reference. They put it all aside. But can you imagine someone in the twenty-first century in effect banning and forbidding the free flow of goods, capital and people just because they did not like a political decision from the other side?

Even that was not enough. Now I must say something regarding resolution 1244 (1999). Not only the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) but the Kosovo Force (KFOR)

derive all their competencies and authorities from that document. It was not NATO's decision; it was a decision by the Security Council to provide these competencies to KFOR in Kosovo. What happened? Since 2014 they had been announcing their strong wish to form their own military.

Let me remind the Council that Serbia, in a letter by its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ivan Mrkic, dated March 2014, warned Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of the possibility of creating a very dangerous situation in the region through the creation of the so-called Kosovo armed forces. Here is Mr. Ban Ki-moon's reply:

"Let me also stress that Security Council 1244 (1999) remains the legal framework for the continuing international security presence in Kosovo and clearly outlines its mandate, which is to provide for a secure environment for all. To this effect, UNMIK will continue to work very closely with the international security force in Kosovo in the fulfilment of these responsibilities."

Let me remind the Council of something else. Paragraph 4 of annex 2 to resolution 1244 (1999) reads as follows:

"The international security presence, with substantial North Atlantic Treaty Organization participation, must be deployed under unified command and control and authorized to establish a safe environment for all people in Kosovo and to facilitate the safe return to their homes of all displaced persons and refugees."

In addition, paragraph 9(b) of the resolution clearly envisages not only the demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army but of all other armed Kosovo Albanian groups; this is absolutely clear.

Aside from that, there is another question: from which document — and that is my open question to all present — do they derive their so-called sovereign right to form their own military? Where is that written? In which document? It is not even written in that form in their own Constitution, because their own Constitution — which we admit we do not recognize — states in its article 144, paragraph 2:

"Any amendment shall require for its adoption the approval of two thirds (2/3) of all deputies of the Assembly including two thirds (2/3) of all deputies of the Assembly holding reserved or guaranteed

seats for representatives of communities that are not in the majority in the Republic of Kosovo."

Of course, they could not find seven Serbs to vote for that, and then, who cares? Who cares about the law? Who cares about the facts? They made a decision, and they formed the so-called Kosovo armed forces.

Unexpectedly, even surprisingly, they received tremendous support for that from various Western countries. Here I wish to quote a statement by the EU-8 — the five EU members of the Security Council, that is, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, as well as Italy, Belgium and Germany — that I received only five minutes before I entered this Chamber: "The initiation of the process of transition of the Kosovo Security Force is Kosovo's sovereign right."

My question to all present is: from which document, from which article, paragraph or rule did they derive that right? Where is it written? I can tell the Council the answer in advance: nowhere. It is just an interpretation — a very bad interpretation — by some countries because it is in their own political interests.

I have just mentioned the safe return of all returnees to their homes. I must inform the Council that Kosovo and Metohija is officially the territory with the lowest rate of returnees in the world. Imagine — only 1.5 per cent of people have gone back to what are the mainly charred remnants of their homes. Only 1.5 per cent. The Council has dealt with many different issues here in this Chamber, but there is no similar issue in the entire world. They created an army and started to threaten to violate and breach even more of the arrangements that we had signed with various organizations, arrangements we had with those organizations, including their presence in the northern part of Kosovo. Regarding arrangements with NATO, the only possibility for them to go with their armed forces to the north is to get consent from NATO, first, and also from the Serb local community. They have already breached that rule several times, even beating the Serbian chief negotiator just because he was sitting at a round table in north Mitrovica discussing an issue related to our dialogue with Pristina.

I will give one important example that best depicts what is happening in Kosovo and Metohija: that of Bogdan Mitrovic, a Serb expelled from Musutiste village. He had wanted to go to what I referred to earlier as the charred remnants of his village, together with his

wife and their three daughters and 6-year-old grandson. Instead of being able to visit their devastated house, he was arrested, viciously treated in the presence of his daughters and grandson and then taken into custody, where he remained for months. There were no indictments or further investigations. That is not the only such case. It is just one example of what they do to Serbs who, not daring to go back to the homes they left behind, go only to visit them.

Mr. Lacroix said that people from Pristina were angry with us because of an issue related to Kosovo's bid to join INTERPOL. We begged them not to go there without finalizing their dialogue with Serbia, but they wanted to go there. We were just defending ourselves. We were just defending the sovereign and independent State of Serbia in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations — nothing more than that. Some people claim that Kosovo reacted that way because we started a campaign to revoke its independence. I want to inform the Council that since we started our dialogue in 2012 — which resumed in 2013 — Kosovo has received an additional 19 recognitions from all over the world and we have not said a single word. We have not been angry. We have not caused any problems in the field. We have not attacked anyone. We have not threatened anyone. However, when reversal process started, all of a sudden it was our fault.

I just want to tell the Council that Serbia has always done everything it could to maintain stability, tranquillity and peace in the entire region. We will refrain from taking the wrong steps in the future as well, because we have suffered a lot in the past and we cannot allow any more of our children to be killed in different types of wars, hostilities and clashes. But we beg all members of the Council — and this is my biggest plea tonight — for someone to curb and tame those people because, to put it very lightly, the measures that they have taken recently are not coherent with the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, they do have one sovereign right. They have formed another negotiating team that includes former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army who are under investigation for committing terrible crimes against Serbian civilians. But that does not matter — I will set that aside. There is something more important. They have articulated all of their prerequisites for the future dialogue, which include our recognition of the independence of Kosovo and our understanding that Kosovo gets to determine its own borders. And they are

not even going to change their State's form, which is unitary. As a result, Serbs are not going to get anything.

My question for everyone here is: What should that future dialogue be about? Should it be about coloured marbles that kids play with in the schoolyard, or what? Despite everything that I have said, Serbia is always ready to resume the process of dialogue. We would like to call on the United Nations to play a bigger role in the future. We have nothing against the European Union-sponsored dialogue, but we need the United Nations to become more involved in the entire process. We need to see some steps taken by Pristina. It needs to withdraw those terrible tariffs and take other actions. That will enable us to ensure the safety of our people. In conclusion, let me speak just two sentences in the Serbian language with regard to the people who are living in Kosovo and Metohija.

(spoke in Serbian; English interpretation provided by the delegation)

I want to commend my Serbian brothers and sisters for everything they have lived through and the torture they continue to face. I want them to know that Serbia will always stand by them.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I thank President Vučić for his statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Thaçi.

Mr. Thaçi *(spoke in Albanian; English interpretation provided by the delegation)*: I am honoured to speak before the Council today on behalf of the institutions and the people of the Republic of Kosovo.

I want to thank the United Nations and the Security Council for their continued focus on Kosovo and the developments in the region. I will never forget the voices of hope and calls for peace that echoed in this Chamber during the darkest days of the citizens of Kosovo, including myself. My people and I will never forget that when we were facing our toughest moments, the Council became our voice. We will remain forever grateful for that. Thanks to the Council, the world learned of the many ills that were suffered during the war with Serbia, including systematic violence, ethnic cleansing, the deaths of thousands of innocent people, the many thousands who are still missing, and the more than 20,000 women who continue to live with the pain and stigma of the sexual violence that was inflicted on

them. The Council was our voice when we did not have one.

However, we are here today two decades after that bloody war and ten years after Kosovo gained its independence. We have been summoned for an extraordinary meeting during a time of complete normality and substantial progress in Kosovo. This is a time to demand a serious review of the degree of engagement of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and when the Council is called on to address the real problems the world is facing today.

Nothing extraordinary happened in Kosovo last week. In fact, what happened was a totally normal decision, both in its mission and in its purpose. If Kosovo has made any mistake, it is that of having waited unnecessarily for five years to establish an army. The decision to establish an army may be belated, but it is in no way wrong. It is belated because we waited for goodwill from those who never showed goodwill towards Kosovo. However, the Republic of Kosovo, which is a sovereign and independent State, has now undertaken the natural step towards establishing its army. I ask the Council what is extraordinary about that? There is nothing at all extraordinary about that. There is nothing that is in contradiction with resolution 1244 (1999), the Ahtisaari plan, the Constitution of Kosovo or even international law.

First and foremost, resolution 1244 (1999), and specifically paragraph 15, refers only to the demilitarization of the Kosovo Liberation Army — a process that was completed in record time and without incident in September 1999. This process was highly appreciated, even by the Security Council and the Secretary-General at the time, Kofi Annan. It was also highly praised by NATO, as substantiated by reports produced by NATO and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo during that time.

Secondly, the comprehensive proposal for the Kosovo status settlement presented by President Ahtisaari — who was the Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo — clearly underscores the right of Kosovo to have an army in article 5.2. Moreover, the strategic review of the security sector, undertaken in close cooperation with NATO, very clearly emphasizes Kosovo's right to transform its Security Force into armed forces.

Finally, and most importantly, the decision of the International Court of Justice — which, might I add, was made upon Serbia's request, specifically by former Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić — underlines the fact that Kosovo did not violate any international laws when it declared its independence. It is therefore Kosovo's indisputable right to have an army. The establishment of the army is the will of the people of Kosovo, with the unanimous political will of the people's chosen representatives — regardless of whether some like it or not. The State of Serbia has expressed its aggravation, but the Serbian citizens of Kosovo have not.

Allow me, in my capacity as the President of the Republic of Kosovo and Commander-in-Chief, to clearly state that Kosovo's armed forces will produce more peace and stability. The transformation of the mission of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) is not a step we have undertaken to send a message to anyone. Kosovo's army is not and will never be a threat to anyone. Kosovo's army is and will remain a professional and multi-ethnic force. Over 10 per cent of the soldiers are from non-majority communities; they include Serbians, Montenegrins, Croats, Turks, Bosniaks, Romas, Egyptians, Ashkali and so on. This is a force that will protect every citizen of Kosovo throughout Kosovo territory — every child and every youngster, regardless of the language that they speak at home.

Until 1999, my people, owing to their tragic past, have always been afraid of military uniforms, precisely because they have historically been foreign and a symbol of repression. However, Kosovo's soldiers will be soldiers of peace and Kosovo's army will be a contributor to stability in the region. In that regard, Kosovo has the highest number of returnees, and that in record time. More than 1 million citizens of Kosovo, expelled violently by the State apparatus of Slobodan Milošević, have returned to the homes and property that were totally destroyed in the summer of 1999. In that context, I am deeply disturbed that some Kosovar Serbs, citizens of Kosovo and members of the KSF, were forced to resign due to immense systemic pressure imposed upon them by elements of the Serbian State.

I was moved by the stories of some soldiers from the Serbian community about the intimidation imposed upon them by the Serbian State. Their families were attacked and their homes hit with grenades, and many of them held for hours on end by Serbian police as they sought to travel to Serbia. This is the terrible truth. I feel awful for them, because I know that the majority of

them handed in their uniforms with tears in their eyes and broken hearts. Nevertheless, I want to guarantee to everyone that we will never back down from our even stronger commitment to including all communities in Kosovo's army. This is an army that will serve all of Kosovo's citizens, without exception. The only threats to our region are irrational calls for war and conflict coming from our northern neighbour.

In addition, allow me to assure the Council that Kosovo will respect every existing international agreement, including the letter sent to the Secretary General of NATO regarding cooperation with the Kosovo Force (KFOR). We will continue to cooperate very closely with NATO. All our efforts will be coordinated with NATO. The establishment of Kosovo's army should not be perceived as an attempt to duplicate the NATO Mission in Kosovo. On the contrary, the decision of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo to establish the army is a direct function of capacity-building that will make our country better able to contribute to local security and beyond. Our aim is to shift the paradigm from a country that has been a consumer of security to one that becomes a contributor to peace and stability. However, this will in no way interfere with NATO's current mission in Kosovo. Kosovo's armed forces will, in fact, complement this mission. Even today in Kosovo, 20 years later, KFOR is treated as a saviour mission. The citizens of my country respect NATO members as heroes; they still hand them out flowers and they will be grateful to them forever.

I am proud to be the President of the most pro-NATO and pro-European Union country in the world. Despite the difficulties and injustices to which we are subject, especially in the visa liberalization process, we as a country stand unshaken in our orientation. We do not have and do not seek any another alternative. The future of Kosovo and our region is within the Euro-Atlantic structures. This inevitably leads us to the essence of today's debate. The problem that our northern neighbour has today is not Kosovo's army but rather the existence of Kosovo itself as an independent and sovereign State. These circumstances make the dialogue between our two countries crucial.

Without a dialogue or a final agreement, we will become countries that produce endless and unnecessary drama for domestic electoral consumption, to the detriment of the future of our nations. I implore the Council to take a look at the abhorrent campaign that Serbia led against Kosovo's bid for INTERPOL.

membership. I should like to know who stands to benefit from Kosovo's lack of membership in that organization. It is organized crime and terrorism that benefit here.

Should I demean this forum now by using the language and methods employed by Serbia against Kosovo? I shall not. To be frank, I feel bad about their behaviour. It is only natural that such behaviour would lead the Government of Kosovo to take measures with respect to Serbian products that come into Kosovo. However, Kosovo did not provoke the situation. That reaction is the consequence of aggressive action on the part of Serbia, and I want to believe that this state of affairs will be overcome in the near future. Pristina and Brussels are communicating intensively about the issue.

We in Kosovo remain committed to peace and dialogue with Serbia nevertheless. To that end, a few days ago the Parliament of Kosovo approved a resolution on dialogue and the structure of the negotiating team, which includes a governing coalition and representatives of opposition parties and civil society. As long as we do not have a final agreement that can be implemented, situations of this kind will continue to be repeated. Neither I nor the people of Kosovo support the conflict. Never in our history have we instigated any conflicts, in fact. We have always been the victims and we have always fought for survival.

Peace does not mean having no disagreements, but this cycle of violence is unjustifiable and must come to an end. In democratic societies, the use of force is a monologue, not a dialogue. It is therefore my generation's duty to leave behind it a region without conflicts and in sustainable peace, a functional Balkans in which Kosovo and Serbia, as two independent nations, aspire to a European future. I know all too well that for leaders, building peace is much more challenging — more dangerous, even — than going to war, but we have an obligation to maintain peace for our children and the generations to come. We owe them a future without conflict. Kosovo is ready. We are ready for dialogue. We are ready to take tough decisions, but decisions from which both Kosovo and Serbia will emerge as winners. However, we are also aware that if we do not seize this historic moment, all the parties involved will suffer the consequences.

Two decades ago, on a mundane day much like this one, I was in uniform, fighting the regime of Slobodan Milošević. I am very proud of my past and that of my fellow fighters. Today, as President of the independent

State of Kosovo, I am aware that I have another big challenge before me, which is the battle for our future, for peace, the battle to end the century-old conflict between our two peoples. I know that it will not be at all easy. I know that it will require compromises and that agreements of this kind are not very popular. However, they are necessary. I firmly believe that an agreement like this has the power to transform our entire region and can shift the priorities of our people. It would mean that no one could win votes founded on hate and populism or be able to stoke people's fears. A comprehensive agreement would open the door to new leadership, whose primary aim would be reform and development. I truly believe in a future where Kosovo and Serbia will sit as equals at the table of the European family. I believe in a future where Kosovo and Serbia's soldiers will serve alongside one another in peacekeeping missions around the world. I believe in that future because I have seen the unimaginable unfold before my eyes.

I am inspired every day by Kosovan athletes who teach us that a comeback is possible after defeat and that our flag can be flown even in countries that have not yet recognized our country. I am inspired by the journalists who criticize me daily but who also make me a better President every day. I am inspired by the citizens of Kosovo who, despite all the pain, suffering and loss that they have endured, never gave up on the values and principles that still stand — liberty, equality, justice and dignity. I believe in a European future for Kosovo and our region, a future without intrigue, conflict or hatred. It is up to us to bring about that future, in the coming weeks and months, through a peaceful, final, legally binding agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, without borders along ethnic lines or exchanges of peoples, but rather through their reciprocal recognition of each other as independent and sovereign countries with multi-ethnic societies.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Taçi for his statement.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would first like to thank our colleagues from Côte d'Ivoire for their principled position and for convening an urgent meeting of the Security Council at the request of Serbia and Russia in connection with the gross violation of resolution 1244 (1999), as a result of

the Pristina Assembly's adoption of a package of laws on the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into fully fledged armed forces.

We are grateful to the Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing and assessments. We also listened carefully to Mr. Hashim Thaçi's statement. We welcome the participation in today's meeting of the President of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Alexander Vučić, and we share his serious concerns about the situation in Kosovo and the illegitimacy surrounding the decision to establish the so-called Kosovo armed forces. We are referring not only to the illegitimacy relating to the decision itself, but also with regard to the assessments of it, such as we have already heard in the references to the statement of the European Union (EU) eight, and which I think we will hear about more than once at this meeting, from those for whom 'international law no longer exists. They are now acting on the basis of a so-called rules-based order into which they fit any illegitimate decisions, adapting them to suit political expediency. Today we will hear painstaking explanations of why resolution 1244 (1999) has nothing to do with the so-called sovereign decision by the Parliament of a so-called sovereign State.

As the years have gone by, we have often warned that rather than being resolved, the problems in Kosovo, alas, are accumulating. We have constantly pointed out that the situation in the region is extremely unstable and could spin out of control at any moment. We have demanded intensive international monitoring based on the Security Council's direction. Our calls have been ignored. They have regularly covered up for Pristina, and as a result, the situation has taken an explosive turn. Pristina's provocative, five-year refusal to fulfil a key agreement with Belgrade on the creation of a community of Serbian municipalities of Kosovo has been compounded by other gross violations. The decision to transform the Kosovo Security Force into the Kosovo armed forces is a blatant violation of resolution 1244 (1999), which, as the Secretary-General has again underscored, remains the fundamental international legal basis for the Kosovo peace settlement. The resolution includes a totally clear requirement that all Kosovo Albanian armed groups must be demilitarized. The only presence on Kosovo's territory that it authorizes is that of exclusively multinational contingents under international control.

No progress is being made in Kosovo on creating conditions conducive to a political settlement. The

EU mediation mission is getting no practical results. Unlawful incidents and violent raids by the Kosovo police special forces on the Serbian population in the north have become more frequent. Ensuring reliable protection for Orthodox buildings in Kosovo is a major problem, and the takeover of Serbian Orthodox Church property by Kosovars continues. The region is still an attractive area for recruiting radicals, and terrorists from Syria and Iraq have been fleeing there. Refugees and internally displaced persons are still returning to the region at unsatisfactorily low levels. A genuine humanitarian crisis threatened when Pristina introduced punishing customs duties on goods from central Serbia. Against that backdrop, the emergence of the Kosovo Armed Forces represents a threat to peace and security in the region through a relapse into armed conflict.

Resolution 1244 (1999) is being flouted knowingly and with the support of leading Western countries as well as through their direct connivance, including through the Kosovo Force (KFOR), whose international security presence in the region is based on that same resolution. We have been compelled to conclude that the Kosovo Force takes an exceedingly selective approach to implementing its mandate. Only a few days ago, on the pretext of ensuring security in the Serb-populated northern regions of Kosovo, KFOR conducted large-scale exercises there using dozens of armoured vehicles. What it looked like was another episode of the intimidation of Kosovo Serbs, while there have been no such exercises in Albanian areas even in cases of overt provocations and violence, such as on 7 and 8 September, when Albanian radicals blocked roads with barriers in order to prevent Serbia's President Vučić from visiting Serbs in a village in the area. KFOR failed to respond adequately to that clear violation of freedom of movement, not to mention the fact that it involved a high-level official.

Under KFOR there has been a long-standing policy of providing systematic training for Albanian personnel in the Kosovo Security Force that exceeds KFOR's remit. We are not talking about dealing with problems in the areas of rescue or civil defence but about training and instruction of a purely military nature. This goes on at Camp Bondsteel, among other places, which was originally established for peacebuilding purposes as part of the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). Its operations are totally untransparent. We insist that KFOR present the Council with a comprehensive

and complete report on how Camp Bondsteel is being used, as well as on the personnel deployed there and its material and technical resources.

The European Union's position is extremely disappointing, in that on the one hand, it claims that it is an objective mediator, and on the other, it pretends to ignore the unlawful creation of a Kosovan army. The EU's response to Pristina's latest decision can only be called toothless. Its irresponsible, two-faced policy has crossed a dangerous line. The emergence of a so-called Kosovo army is an existential danger to Serbs. And we can see why. Suffice it to say that the ranks of the Kosovo Security Force include more than a few former militants from the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity during the conflict, whose victims were Serbs, minorities and dissenting Albanians. Those who committed crimes that included kidnapping people and removing their organs in order to sell them on the black market are still avoiding accountability. It is increasingly difficult to take seriously the promises we keep hearing year after year that the Kosovo Specialist Chambers for prosecuting the KLA's crimes will supposedly ensure the triumph of justice.

What is particularly worrying is the possibility that armed Kosovo-Albanian units could invade Serb-populated areas in the north in order to enforce Pristina's control over the entire territory of Kosovo. Such a scenario could lead to bloodshed and become a real disaster that could send the Balkans back into a period of turmoil and kill the efforts to stabilize the region that the international community has made in recent decades. Unfortunately, we have no confidence in the international security presence's ability and preparedness to prevent such a blitzkrieg.

We have taken note of the continuing highly responsible and restrained response on the part of the Serbian leadership in urging Kosovo Serbs to remain calm and not react to provocations, as well as its efforts to reduce tensions solely by diplomatic means. However, we also believe it is essential to take extremely seriously the Serbian leadership's message that if the Kosovo-Albanian security forces invade the north or attempt pogroms against Serbs in other parts of Kosovo, Belgrade will protect them. In our view, the international security presence bears the chief responsibility for providing that protection.

In addition, in accordance with paragraph 9 (b) of resolution 1244 (1999), the Kosovo Force is obliged to take immediate and thorough measures to demilitarize and disband any armed Kosovo-Albanian units. As for the decision on creating the so-called Kosovo Armed Forces in violation of the resolution, it should be immediately rescinded. We hope that within the framework of its mandate, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) will continue to play an active role in ensuring the conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all of Kosovo's residents, protecting and promoting human rights and facilitating the political process. We also hope that the European Union will use its capabilities, including its presence in Kosovo and the mechanisms of its Stabilization and Association Agreement with Pristina, to prevent the situation from deteriorating further, and will help to enable the revocation of the Kosovo-Albanian authorities' provocative decisions on trade tariffs and armed forces.

In conclusion, we should point to the counterproductive attempts by Pristina's patrons to conceal the deteriorating situation in Kosovo from the international community and create obstacles to the regular consideration of the Kosovo problem in the Security Council. And that kind of policy is one of the reasons for the current crisis situation there, because it gives the Kosovo authorities a feeling that anything is permitted and no one is accountable. The Council must continue to be focused on the situation in Kosovo. The quarterly cycle for the Secretary-General's reports on UNMIK's activity should be strictly observed. We cannot exclude the possibility that if the adverse trends escalate it could be necessary to convene new emergency meetings of the Security Council. God forbid that should be the case, needless to say.

We would like to draw the Secretariat's attention to the importance of carefully monitoring the developing situation and reporting on it to the Security Council.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jean Pierre Lacroix for his briefing and welcome President Vučić of the Republic of Serbia and President Thaçi of the Republic of Kosovo to the Council. I will focus on three points — first, the sovereignty of Kosovo; secondly, the background to the current tensions; and thirdly, the need for a resumption of the European Union (EU)-facilitated dialogue.

On my first point, I want to emphasize that the Kingdom of the Netherlands fully supports the independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Kosovo. As a sovereign State, Kosovo has the right to create its own institutions. That said, we believe that the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force should be a transparent and inclusive process, in line with Kosovo's Constitution. The Netherlands encourages Kosovo to work on the transformation in consultation with NATO and other relevant international actors. The inclusivity of the process is important to ensuring that the 10-year transition has the support of all in Kosovo and especially its non-majority communities. More broadly, Kosovo's path towards further normalization should be an orderly process in which the Council's resolutions and decisions should be respected and fully implemented by all players on the ground.

That brings me to my second point, the background to the current tensions. The decision by the Kosovo authorities to start the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force comes at a sensitive moment. We have recently seen both sides take a series of steps that have not been conducive to a climate furthering the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Almost two decades after the adoption of resolution 1244 (1999), Belgrade and Pristina have made significant progress in reaching agreement on important issues. Yet they still have to agree on many aspects of their future relationship. Understandably, the process is not easy and has its ups and downs. It is also the reason why we still have to spend time in the Council discussing the situation in Kosovo, even if it no longer constitutes an imminent or grave threat to international peace and security. We call on both countries to act responsibly and to work to calm the situation.

That brings me to my third point. It is essential that both sides resume the EU-facilitated dialogue as soon as possible, without preconditions, and implement the agreements made in the past. They should realize that the status quo is not a long-term solution. Security depends on good-neighbourly relations. Everyone in the region stands to gain from political normalization, more economic integration and fewer trade barriers.

It is key for Kosovo to improve the daily lives of all its citizens. The implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, as well as of the European reform agenda, is crucial to achieving that lofty goal. Both parties should avoid unilateral actions that go against the spirit of dialogue

and undermine mutual trust. We therefore regret the fact that some members of the Council insisted on having a public debate today rather than an interactive dialogue.

In conclusion, we ask Serbia and Kosovo to demonstrate their political will and commitment to normalization by continuing to work in the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his very informative presentation, and I especially want to welcome President Vučić and President Thaçi to our meeting.

This meeting comes in the wake of recent decisions by Kosovo's Parliament on the evolution of the Kosovo Security Force over the next 10 years. In the light of the issues that Mr. Lacroix has just outlined for us, France has taken note of those decisions but, as the Secretary-General has done, wishes to express its concern about the possibility that the situation could deteriorate. We deplore the fact that since the beginning of the year, and particularly in the past few weeks, several incidents and unilateral decisions have affected the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. I am referring specifically to the Kosovo Government's decision to impose a 100 per cent tax on products from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, like the European Union, we call on the Kosovo authorities to rescind. More generally, and like the Secretary-General, we ask both sides to exercise the greatest possible restraint and urge them to do all they can to resolve their disputes through dialogue in order to limit the risk of escalation.

Two principles must guide our views on this subject — respect for Kosovo's sovereignty, which is the basis for the decision to initiate the transition of the Kosovo Security Force, and strict respect for the remit of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), as established by resolution 1244 (1999). While it seems legitimate to us that Kosovo, which we recognize as a State, should be able to acquire an armed force, this is not a good time to enact such laws, because it is likely to damage the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina at a moment when it is more necessary than ever. We also deplore the fact that the laws were not enacted in concert with NATO and did not go through the constitutional process. Finally, we hope that the Kosovo Security Force's deployment to the north of the country follows the current arrangements, which stipulate that such

deployment can take place only with the prior agreement of KFOR.

The implications for the stability of the region of a comprehensive and definitive settlement of the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo are huge. The goal of advancing towards a comprehensive and legally binding agreement normalizing their relations, endorsed by both sides at the highest level, must remain an absolute priority. It is therefore crucial to sustain and promote efforts to that end and ensure a sustainable environment that fosters progress in that direction. In that regard, we encourage the leaders of both countries to resume the demanding path of dialogue as soon as possible and to demonstrate the essential spirit of responsibility and political will. Each party must refrain from any action, statement or measure likely to exacerbate tensions and undermine the spirit of normalization.

Beyond the urgent need for regional stabilization and reconciliation for current generations, everyone must look decisively to the future with a view to overcoming the difficulties of today. High Representative Federica Mogherini, whose mediation efforts France supports, reminded both parties of that on 8 November. Our authorities at the highest level fully support the efforts to make progress in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Only by fully normalizing their relations will they be able to realize their European prospects, and that is the shared compass that should guide and unite them. That is where their future lies, and it is a shared future.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing. I also listened very carefully to what President Vučić and President Thaçi said today.

We believe that Kosovo's development of its own armed forces is within its sovereign right as a self-governing independent State, and we urge Kosovo to do it — and on this I agree with the French representative — in close consultation with NATO and the wider international community. I note from Kosovo's announcement that this development is to take place over the course of 10 years.

Since resolution 1244 (1999) was adopted, Kosovo has become an independent, self-governing State recognized by more than 100 members of the United Nations, and its decision to extend the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force should be viewed in that context. The United Kingdom's interpretation of

resolution 1244 (1999) is that it does not — I repeat, it does not — contain anything that precludes the future transition of the mandate of the Kosovo Security Force. In fact, I reread it at lunch time. I then went on to read the document that followed it, the constitutional framework and the United Nations Ahtisaari plan, the so-called Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement. I can assure the Council that nothing in any of those three documents precludes the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force. The constitutional framework set up a Kosovo Protection Force. The Constitution builds on that proposal and this recent decision builds on the Constitution. I just wanted to establish that. That said, we continue to urge Kosovo to act responsibly, transparently and in consultation with NATO allies, and to uphold its existing commitments to arrangements with the Kosovo Force. What President Thaçi said about his assurances today in that respect is welcome, but needless to say we expect to see it put into action.

I have noted the claim that the transition of the Kosovo Security Force represents a threat to the Kosovo-Serb community. That claim is not borne out by Kosovo's genuine efforts to make the Force a multi-ethnic force, as NATO allies have requested, and we regret that those efforts have been undermined by external pressure. We encourage the Kosovo Government to continue its outreach to the Kosovo-Serb community in order to allay anxieties. It has been a long time since the Council visited Kosovo, but I was on one of the earlier trips, during which we visited the Kosovo-Serb community in the north, where we heard from many people — but not all of them — who supported the account given by President Vučić and the Russian Ambassador today. Nor do we share Belgrade's perception that the Kosovo Security Force's expansion in size and mandate over the next decade risks jeopardizing regional stability. We look to Belgrade to respond in a measured way, including in public statements.

In the light of that, the United Kingdom considers the assertions by senior politicians and officials about the possible use of force by Serbia unhelpful, and we reject the idea that even the notion of such use of force might be floated. I think it is irresponsible that one member of the Council has repeated them today. I agree with that member that there is a risk of a return to turmoil, but it is not caused by that decision. It is caused by those outside Kosovo who would seek to exploit it for their own ends. However, I take encouragement

from hearing about Russian support for NATO today, which I think may be a first in this Chamber.

As other speakers have noted, the fundamental reason that we are here and that those problems persist is because of the lack of normalization. At every step, settlements and progress have been blocked. The United Nations, the European Union (EU), the United States and Russia have tried and, unfortunately, at every stage of trying to settle the issue, there has been a blockage, which I am sorry to say has come from Belgrade. The only way forward is through normalization, and we look to both Kosovo and Serbia to make progress in that way. We note with optimism the resolution that the Assembly of Kosovo adopted on 15 December establishing a cross-party negotiating team. I join my French colleague and others in urging both sides to return to negotiations through the EU-facilitated dialogue. Progress on the dialogue is vital to stability, security and prosperity in the two countries in the region. The final agreement itself must also contribute to local, regional and global stability. The two sides have to keep in mind that any proposals they put forward through the negotiations must enhance the safety and security of all — I repeat, all — their citizens.

Obviously, I do not find it surprising, since I took part in it, that a statement was delivered today on behalf of the EU-8, the five EU members of the Security Council — France, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom — along with Italy, Belgium and Germany. But the reason it is not surprising is because it is our region. We still care very deeply about what happens in the Western Balkans. While EU countries and the EU itself have put a great deal of effort into helping stability and security there, it is their future — the future of Kosovo and Serbia. As other speakers have done today, I urge them to take all the steps necessary to normalize their relations through the EU-facilitated dialogue. I call on all their leaders, who have been elected to represent their people's interests, to enable that to happen. Both countries must now focus on a sustainable normalization agreement through the dialogue, an agreement that enhances security, enjoys popular domestic support and benefits both countries. We stand ready, as we have always done, to support such an agreement.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations for his briefing today and welcome President Vučić and

President Thaçi to the Council. We thank them for their remarks and for joining us here today.

The United States reaffirms its support for a gradual, transparent transition to a professional, multi-ethnic NATO interoperable force that serves and reflects all of Kosovo's communities. The legislation passed by Kosovo's Assembly last week is fully in line with resolution 1244 (1999). It is Kosovo's sovereign right to establish and maintain an armed force. Resolution 1244 (1999) authorized the establishment of an international security presence in Kosovo and charged it with demilitarizing the Kosovo Liberation Army and other armed Kosovo-Albanian groups. Those provisions do not apply to the Kosovo Security Force. The Force is neither the Kosovo Liberation Army nor an armed Kosovo-Albanian group. It is a separate, multi-ethnic force that was established following Kosovo's 2008 independence, and which the International Court of Justice clearly ruled in 2010 does not violate international law or resolution 1244 (1999).

The vote on Kosovo on 14 December brings no immediate change to the structure, mission or operations of the Force. Rather, it was a first step, representing the beginning of the practical, ongoing work of building a multi-ethnic force, in accordance with the Government of Kosovo's 10-year transition plan. We call on the Government of Kosovo to continue its close coordination with NATO allies and partners in engaging in outreach to its minority communities now and throughout the years-long process ahead. We expect the Government of Kosovo to adhere reliably to all existing arrangements and commitments regarding troop movements and the operation of forces in Kosovo, particularly its 2013 commitment to the NATO Secretary General that any operations in northern Kosovo require consultation with the Commander of the Kosovo Force. Ultimately, however, Kosovo's security is best served by normalizing relations with Serbia. Dialogue should be both countries' overarching priority, and we urge both to remove any barriers and not to take provocative actions that prevent a return to the negotiating table and reaching a comprehensive normalization agreement.

We encourage both Kosovo and Serbia to take immediate steps to lower tensions and create the conditions for rapid progress on the normalization dialogue. We urge them to recognize the value of fully committing to normalization, which will bring great benefits to the people, the economies and the peace and security of both countries. Mutual recognition and

normalized relations between Serbia and Kosovo are the future, and all sides will benefit from recognizing and embracing that reality.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation welcomes His Excellency President Aleksandar Vučić and Mr. Hashim Thaçi to the Chamber and thanks Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for providing us with an overview of recent developments.

We would like to remind the Council that one month ago in this very Chamber (see S/PV.8399), we expressed our concern about the possible transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into armed forces. Now we are hearing about the recent decision to adopt three laws initiating such a transition. We share the Secretary-General's position on the matter and his call to all the parties concerned to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could lead to further setbacks in the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. That reflects the current state of affairs in the region, which requires our continued attention as a matter of relevance in the agenda. Our priorities in that direction should be the continued promotion of dialogue between the parties, as well as confidence-building measures in the political-military, socioeconomic and human dimensions, in compliance with resolution 1244 (1999) and subsequent documents.

Kazakhstan also supports the calls of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Mogherini, addressed to Pristina to remove taxes on products imported from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as they go against the spirit of regional cooperation and hinders the dialogue process. Such a dialogue should be carried out under the auspices of the European Union, with the involvement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other relevant regional and subregional organizations, to maintain comprehensive and sustainable security and development in Kosovo.

In that vein, we consider it important that the parties adhere to the agreements previously reached through the mediation of international organizations. We believe in the importance of ensuring peace and security in the region. An international security presence will contribute to the establishment of a whole-communities safe environment, and we agree with the Secretary-General on that. We stand for action within the existing international negotiating mechanisms.

Once again, we express our regret that the region decided to go ahead with the formation of an army. To that end, it is highly important to underline that any unilateral steps outside of the existing international negotiating mechanisms could raise tensions, constitute a serious threat to peace and jeopardize overall stability in the region. Kazakhstan urges all interested parties to continue implementing their commitments in a good spirit of mutual respect, understanding and compromise for the sake of long-lasting peace and stability in that part of the world.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I would like to welcome the presence of the President of Serbia, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, who is in attendance and has spoken at this meeting. I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing. I also carefully listened to the statement by Mr. Hashim Thaçi.

China has been closely following the Kosovo issue and has noted the complex dynamics at play in Kosovo's current security situation. Resolution 1244 (1999) is an important legal basis for settling the Kosovo issue. It is China's consistent position that the parties reaching a mutually acceptable solution through dialogue within the framework of the relevant Council resolutions is the best approach to a solution to the Kosovo issue. The parties concerned should refrain from any rhetoric or action that could complicate or escalate the situation and should create enabling conditions for a lasting solution to the Kosovo issue.

China respects Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, understands Serbia's legitimate concerns about the Kosovo issue and commends Serbia's efforts to find a political solution to the matter. China hopes that the parties concerned will continue their pragmatic, constructive dialogue, remain firmly committed to a political solution, implement the agreements reached, gradually enhance mutual trust, meet each other halfway and continue to build consensus with an eye to a lasting solution that is acceptable to all parties.

Tolerance, reconciliation and harmonious coexistence among all ethnic groups in Kosovo are in line with the fundamental interests and development needs of all the populations. We hope all the parties concerned will put the well-being of the people first, protect the legitimate rights and interests of all ethnic groups, promote their economic and social development

and jointly safeguard peace, stability and prosperity in the Balkans.

The Security Council should remain seized of the Kosovo issue and encourage the parties concerned to engage in genuine dialogue in good faith so we can continue to play a constructive role in the search for a proper solution to the Kosovo issue.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing to the Security Council. I would like to recognize and express my appreciation for the presence of Presidents Thaçi and Vučić, who are in the Chamber today.

As we see it, the main threats to stability in the Western Balkans are the pending issues related to the status of Kosovo. They are holding back the European Union (EU) integration process, which in turn is the main driver of stability in the region, both for Serbia and for Kosovo. The focus of the international community must be on insisting that the parties reach a comprehensive and legally binding agreement that contributes to regional stability. The international community should also focus on offering support to that process.

With regard to the recent legislation passed by the Kosovo Assembly on the Kosovo Security Force, in principle that is a matter for the sovereign State of Kosovo. At the same time, we — as do others — strongly encourage Pristina to ensure that the transformation of its security force over the next 10 years takes place through a transparent and inclusive process, in line with the Constitution and in close coordination with NATO and its partners. It is important that all communities be associated with that exercise, so as to ensure that the transition eventually receives overall support in Kosovo.

Over the past weeks and months, the steps taken by both sides have not contributed to good-neighbourly relations and a climate conducive to the normalization of relations. It is important that all sides refrain from actions and statements that might increase tensions. We call on both parties to adhere to regional agreements, including free trade agreements.

We have recently seen a renewed commitment from both Belgrade and Pristina to engage in the normalization dialogue facilitated by the European Union. The dialogue must continue without preconditions. It is

the only path to a sustainable political and inclusive solution for the region. In that regard, we welcome the recent resolution of the Kosovo Parliament establishing a cross-party team for the dialogue, with the aim of creating a unified platform. We underline the need for the full and effective participation of women in the dialogue, as well as consultations with civil society, including women's organizations.

The future of both Serbia and Kosovo lies within the European Union. Our message to the two Presidents present here is that both Pristina and Belgrade need to implement commitments and pursue the dialogue process with constructive engagement and dedication. Now is the time to show courageous and visionary leadership. If they put the choice of confrontation or cooperation to their people, I am sure that the people will support the latter, as they understand that cooperation is what is needed to bring about peace and prosperity in the region.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to express our thanks for the convening of this meeting and for the briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix. We would also like to welcome the presence of the President of Serbia, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, and the President of Kosovo, Mr. Hashim Thaçi.

Peru supports the peacebuilding process in Kosovo, the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade and stability in the Balkan subregion. To that end, we consider it paramount that all parties remain committed to the fulfilment and implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels agreements, and that the Council remain united and attentive in the exercise of its role as guarantor.

Last month, when the Council was considering the legislative initiative concerning the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into a regular army (see S/PV.8399), we expressed the need for careful evaluation. We underline the need to take into account the presence and role of the Kosovo Force, as well as the impact of the measure on the political dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. In the same vein, we agree with the Secretary-General that the three laws adopted by the Kosovar Parliament are not in conformity with resolution 1244 (1999) and the Brussels agreements, which, as we recall, provided for the establishment of an international security force led by NATO and of the Kosovo Police Force, respectively. Peru calls on all

parties to exercise restraint with a view to promoting détente and constructive dialogue, in accordance with applicable international law and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Let me begin by thanking His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, for his presence at the Security Council today. I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Hashim Thaçi, President of the Republic of Kosovo. I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing. I will now make the following statement with regard to the issue at hand.

We recognize that the transition of the Kosovo Security Force is in principle a matter for Kosovo to decide. However, we stress that it is of the utmost importance that the future armed forces of Kosovo be formed through an inclusive and gradual process, while respecting the relevant provisions of the Constitution. Then and only then can they serve the security interests of all communities.

In our assessment, recent developments do not in and of themselves constitute a threat to international peace. We trust that all political actors in the region will act responsibly and refrain from any statements or actions that may lead to escalation. We welcome the restraint shown thus far.

We also reiterate our conviction that lasting stability in the region can be achieved only through continued dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina under the auspices of the European Union, which should lead to a legally binding agreement on the comprehensive normalization of relations.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing on the latest developments in Kosovo. I also welcome the presence of the President of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, at today's meeting, and thank him for his remarks. I also thank Mr. Hashim Thaçi for his statement.

Our position on the issue of Kosovo has always been consistent and clear. We would like to reaffirm our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and for the peaceful and amicable resolution of all outstanding issues between Belgrade and Pristina, in accordance with the Brussels Agreement. We expressed our views on this issue at the briefing we had last month (see S/PV.8399).

With regard to the latest developments, we take note of the statement issued by the Secretary-General expressing concern about the adoption by the Assembly of Kosovo of three draft laws aimed at strengthening the role and capacity of the Kosovo Security Force (SG/SM/19408). As the Secretary-General rightly underscored, resolution 1244 (1999) provides the sole legal framework for the international security presence, the Kosovo Force, which was entrusted with the responsibility to ensure a safe and secure environment in Kosovo. Therefore, any action taken that is contrary to what is stipulated in resolution 1244 (1999) would not help but to undermine efforts aimed at finding a solution to the Kosovo issue through dialogue. That is why we echo the call made by the Secretary-General to the parties to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could raise tensions and cause further setbacks in the European Union-facilitated dialogue for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Ethiopia fully supports the work that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has been undertaking in discharging its mandates in line with resolution 1244 (1999). We also recognize the significant role of the European Union on matters concerning Kosovo.

In conclusion, the security and stability of Kosovo and the region will ultimately be ensured when there is political will and resolve on the part of both sides. In that respect, we once again encourage both parties to remain committed to dialogue and negotiation with the view to finding a mutually acceptable solution.

Mr. Edjang Nnaga (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to express our delegation's welcome to His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia, and Mr. Hashim Thaçi, who honour the Security Council with their presence at this important briefing on Kosovo. We also thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his detailed briefing on recent developments.

As we have made clear in all of our statements in this Chamber, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea always advocates recourse to dialogue, consultation and negotiation to settle disputes and conflicts. In line with that position, the delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea regrets the problems that have arisen between Kosovo and Serbia, and we call on the parties

to remain calm and refrain from making statements or doing anything that might lead to an escalation and undermine stability and security, not only locally but in the Balkans in general.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea reaffirms its respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, and we are grateful for its continued efforts aimed at finding a political, inclusive and peaceful solution to the question of Kosovo. We also encourage Pristina to refrain from actions that could stifle regional cooperation, increase tensions and damage the trust generated between the different communities, thereby jeopardizing the entire effort of the international community to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in Kosovo.

We also encourage the parties to intensify their efforts aimed at improving regional cooperation, safeguarding good relations of trust among communities and respecting the implementation of agreements reached and the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999). Furthermore, we urge the countries that support the parties to the conflict to do everything possible to ensure that Belgrade and Pristina return to the negotiating table as the only way to find a lasting solution to the dispute between them.

Finally, we appreciate the work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the support it provides to Kosovo's communities, as well as regional and international actors and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with a view to fulfilling the mandate of resolution 1244 (1999).

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, for his briefing. We also thank the President of Serbia, Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, for his remarks, and Mr. Hashim Thaçi for his statement.

Bolivia calls for the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), including respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Serbia. The resolution remains in full force, for which supervision by the international community is necessary. That resolution provides the only legal framework for the international security presence, which in this case is fulfilled by the Kosovo Force, responsible for ensuring a safe environment in the province. Any obstacle preventing the Kosovo Force

from fulfilling its responsibilities would be inconsistent with the resolution I have just mentioned.

In that context, the adoption of three draft laws by the Assembly of Kosovo aimed at strengthening the role and the capacity of the Kosovo Security Force is cause for alarm. We reiterate that any attempt to transform the Kosovo Security Force into an armed force would run counter to resolution 1244 (1999) and international law. We call on the Kosovo authorities to refrain from that action.

We urge all interested parties to act with restraint and to refrain from undertaking such actions, which could increase tensions and lead to a new setback in the dialogue facilitated by the European Union for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Furthermore, we also view with concern the increase in import tariffs by Kosovo against Serbia, which can be seen as another provocation that undermines that dialogue.

We believe that it is important that the parties comply with the commitments made in that context. Along those lines, we take note of the efforts of the European Union and the mediation of its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in order to make progress in implementing the existing agreements.

Finally, we urge the parties to work towards a peaceful solution through dialogue through a firm commitment, based on confidence-building measures, to using good offices to ease tensions and peaceful means to seek consensus-based solutions, in line with the obligation to negotiate, as stipulated by international law. Such means should make it possible to preserve peace, while promoting political dialogue and respect for human rights, taking into account the well-being of the region and its population.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and His Excellency Mr. Hashim Thaçi, President of the Republic of Kosovo, at today's meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his valuable briefing.

The State of Kuwait acknowledges the sensitivity of the measure taken by the Assembly of Kosovo. We reaffirm that every State has the full, sovereign and inherent right to establish its national institutions in

line with its national Constitution and legislation. We recognize that the decisions recently taken by the Kosovo Parliament could be a source of concern to the friendly Republic of Serbia, given the recent developments in the relationship between the two States.

We hope that such developments do not undermine the political process under the auspices of the European Union. We believe that the decision of the Republic of Kosovo does not contravene resolution 1244 (1999). We thank the President of Kosovo for the reassurances that he provided in the Chamber earlier, in which he stated that the measure does not constitute any threat to the minorities in Kosovo or the neighbouring States.

We call on both sides to exercise self-restraint and to take all necessary measures to calm the situation and to decrease tension. We urge them to continue to deal with issues of concern through dialogue and to demonstrate the necessary political will in order to ensure the full normalization of relations between the two sides.

Kuwait affirms that the high-level European Union-facilitated dialogue in Brussels between Belgrade and Pristina remains the most appropriate framework for settling all outstanding issues between the two sides. It is the appropriate means for reaching lasting, just and consensual solutions.

We would like to reiterate our full support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. We highly value the vital role that the United Nations has played in helping Kosovo to build its institutions and to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1244 (1999). We call on both sides to fully implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. We also welcome the statement by the Secretary-General in that regard.

In conclusion, it is important that the international community continues to make efforts in order to urge Pristina and Belgrade to overcome their differences and reach consensual, fair and sustainable solutions that are acceptable to both sides and lead to peace, security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation welcomes the presence of His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, at this briefing on the recent developments in the situation in Kosovo. We also welcome the presence of President Hashim Thaçi. We also thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing.

The vote on 14 December on three draft laws aimed at transforming the Kosovo Security Force into a national army has provoked a response from the international community. However, that initiative, which falls within the sovereign right of Kosovo, could have implications for the mandate of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force. In fact, the implementation of those laws could be incompatible with the provisions of resolution 1244 (1999), which is the only legal framework for the presence of those international forces in Kosovo.

That decision takes place in the context of a stalemate in the negotiations led by Mrs. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, with a view to normalizing relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

My country therefore calls on all parties to exercise restraint and to avoid unilateral acts that could exacerbate the already visible tensions in the region. We urge them to swiftly return to the negotiating table in order to ease the tensions resulting from the recent initiatives and to create conditions conducive to resolving all disputed issues between the two parties. In the light of its experience, Côte d'Ivoire is convinced that the pursuit of peace through dialogue is the only viable way to restore lasting stability and good-neighbourly relations in the Balkans.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire calls on all stakeholders to engage in the European Union-facilitated negotiations in good faith and without conditions in order to give peace a chance.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Mr. Vučić, President of the Republic of Serbia, has asked for the floor to make a further statement

Mr. Vučić (Serbia): Once again, I am very thankful to all participants and profoundly grateful to all those who wanted at least to listen to us. I think that it was very obvious that no one could refer to a single provision, article or paragraph from which Pristina

derives its right to form its armed forces. Some people said that that was not banned by resolution 1244 (1999) but no one cited a single regulation, rule or article from which Pristina derived its right to create its own army. There is a very simple reason for that, since that article or regulation does not exist. At the same time, I am very grateful to the many people who, regardless of their political attitude towards the Kosovo issue, wanted to be objective and to analyse the reality.

I want to refer to just a few arguments used by Pristina and some of the Ambassadors in the Chamber. The representative of Pristina said that terrible ethnic cleansing was committed by the Serb forces. Here are the facts.

There used to be 1.4 million Albanians in the southern Serbian province. Today there are 1.7 million Albanian people in Kosovo, where there used to be 220,000 Serbs. There are still between 105,000 and 106,000 Serbs living in Kosovo. Those are the numbers. Those are the facts. Who committed ethnic cleansing? Is there anyone who can deny those numbers? I am not saying that we have always been absolutely right in everything. Not at all. I have to say, however, that that kind of biased approach is not only killing the truth, but it is also killing real chances for reaching a compromise between the two sides.

At the same time, I heard something that I could not understand. At least the two representatives of Pristina and — I believe — the United Kingdom referred to the Ahtisaari plan. What is that plan about? When was that plan adopted, by whom, in which organization, by which factions and by which parties? When they do not have sufficient arguments, as they do not have enough facts on their side, they then refer to something that does not exist. It has never been put in force. Are we or are we not speaking the truth? There are no real provisions, articles, arrangements or agreements to which they can refer. Someone here mentioned the use of force. It was the Ambassador of the United Kingdom. I never mentioned that, and we did not use any kind of force, unlike the other side. It used force against the chief negotiator — beating him up and trying to humiliate him — merely because he was speaking loudly about the Kosovo problem. He carried out his notifications in accordance with all our arrangements with Pristina.

It seems to me that it is much easier for some countries to blame Serbia for everything. It does not matter whether or not we did something. We did not

impose taxes against them. We did not create any kind of army in the north or within the Serb community. That does not exist. We did not do anything, but we have to be blamed because someone has to justify his own wrong politics. And speaking about INTERPOL, the representative of Pristina said here that only organized crime benefited from INTERPOL's wrong decision. No, I want Pristina to do much better with regard to organized crime issues, but today that is the worst place in Europe with regard to such an important issue.

Concerning the support of the Serb community and the so-called Kosovo armed forces, they were coming in tears complaining that we in Serbia were exerting great pressure on them. All 10 mayors — all of them — from all 10 Serb-inhabited municipalities in Kosovo referred to Mr. Thaçi's statement and said that he was not telling the truth and that they are absolutely against the formation of the Kosovo armed forces. They see the formation of the Kosovo armed forces as a grave threat to their survival. Who knows that better than they do?

Once again, I am profoundly grateful to all those people who have shown their support for the territorial integrity of Serbia and resolution 1244 (1999). At the same time, I am also thankful to those people who — although some of them recognized the independence of Kosovo — wanted to see things in a very objective way. They have my promise that Serbia will do its best to keep the peace and maintain tranquillity and stability. As everyone knows, the Serbian people are a very proud and dignified people, and we just want to avoid all forms of humiliation targeting us, which we would not allow anyone else in the world to suffer. It does not matter how big they are or how small we are. We will resume and carry on our dialogue as soon as they rescind their irresponsible decision involving those tariffs.

I am not very optimistic. I am telling the Council that my concerns and worries are even greater today than they were yesterday. I believe that we have acted and reacted so far in a very serious and responsible way, and we will continue in the same manner. Hopefully, one day, we will be able to reach a possible arrangement with Pristina, but recently everything that they have done has been extremely irresponsible, taking us backwards five, six or seven years. We need the Council's full support and for the United Nations to play a larger role. We will strive to that end more than

ever by asking of the Council to support all processes that will lead us to a possible arrangement.

I thank everyone once again for listening to us, and, hopefully, nothing worse than what has happened over recent weeks will happen in the future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Thaçi.

Mr. Thaçi (*spoke in Albanian; English interpretation provided by delegation*): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to address the Security Council once again, and I thank everyone for their support and understanding.

We cannot deny the past. We know who the victim was, and we know who the aggressor was. There will be no rewriting of history. The war took place in the twentieth century, and we must accept that reality without theatricality and look forward towards the future. As unfounded accounts of how events unfolded were provided, let me state several facts before the Council.

Whether one likes it or not, the State of Serbia killed 13,500 Albanian civilians in the Kosovo conflict. Not one person has been accused. Serbia's State apparatus — its paramilitary police troops — also raped approximately 20,000 Albanian women, with no one accused let alone convicted. One million Albanians were forcibly expelled from Kosovo, where 40 per cent of the infrastructure was destroyed by Serbian State forces. President Milošević was accused but never convicted. There were 400 massacres of Albanians, but not a single person has been indicted or convicted. One hundred and sixty people were killed in the village of Izbica alone — men, women, children and the elderly. Two hundred and fifty civilians were killed

in Krusha — again, men, women, children and the elderly — and 64 remain missing, with no one accused or convicted. Three hundred and sixty people — men, women, children and the elderly — were killed in the village of Meja, with no investigations, indictments or convictions. In the village of Studime, 116 were killed; again, with no one accused or convicted. The same happened in Račak, Rezala, Gornje Obrinje and all other massacre sites.

To those who talk about justice we say that fighters in Kosovo were subject to justice in a number of instances, first with the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo in parallel with the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and then with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. Twenty years on, Kosovo wants to show the greatest level of State responsibility by believing in truth and justice. In partnership with the international community and the European Union, Kosovo has established Specialist Chambers and will cooperate with authorities in a transparent, responsible and credible manner in the process.

Let me also emphasize that, regardless of the fact that we are the victims, today in Kosovo there are more Albanians than Serbs being convicted of war crimes, while in Serbia not a single Serb has been convicted in any of the 400 massacres and instances of ethnic cleansing committed against Albanians in Kosovo. Moreover, Serbia's Office of the Prosecutor for War Crimes is no longer operating. I believe in the right and just war we conducted, just as I do not question that some fighters might have deviated from the struggle for freedom.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.